

a star trek
fanzine

Scotpress



Patricia Parker

ENTERPRISE

LOG ENTRIES 77

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ScoTpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona

Hello, and welcome to Enterprise - Log Entries 77.

With reference to the last editorial, we know now that some people do read them. We have had some response to the T-shirts I mentioned recently, so I have been making enquiries. Unfortunately, in the numbers we would want the only source I could find worked out more expensive than I had hoped. However, we may try a few out as an experiment, so if you are interested, look for the ScoTpress table at UFP Con.

The three of us have enjoyed what we have seen of The Next Generation, and we have already been asked our policy with regard to Next Generation stories. If we receive submissions, we will produce a Next Generation zine; however, Log Entries will continue to carry original Star Trek series material. So, if you would like to see a Next Generation zine from ScoTpress, please send us your stories, poetry and artwork.

Molly has asked me to thank those of you who send in used stamps. For those of you who don't know, we continue to support the Guide Dogs by collecting stamps. Anyone else who would like to help, please send stamps to either of us, or direct to

Mrs M MacLeod
15 Letter Daill
Cairnbaan
Lochgilphead
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Scotland.

Molly acknowledges donations of stamps in the STAG newsletter (even one or two help to increase the quantity going to Guide Dog Headquarters.)



Submissions of poetry, artwork and fiction are always welcome for ScoTpress zines. We are looking for series-based action-adventure stories, preferably with some character inter-relationship. Alternate universe stories are acceptable, but even these should not be movie based, K/S, or involve the death of main characters, or be primarily about other ships. These are, after all, "The voyages of the Starship Enterprise..."

Submissions can be sent to either

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A MATTER OF TRUST

by

Charlotte Davis

(First printed in SPOCK 45, Austrek.)

The two Vulcan males fell silent and looked over at the entrance to the main room on hearing the soft swish of material as T'Pring pushed aside the hanging and entered with a gesture of apology. When she saw Stonn raise his eyebrows in an expression of inquiry she inclined her head, waiting for him to address her. The research plans he had been discussing with the Chief Scientist of his department had priority over every other project, being urgent; however, he knew T'Pring would have avoided this intrusion had there not been a matter overriding even this phase of work.

"I have directed you not to disturb us," he said quietly.

"My Master, there is a message from your Clan, which is to be answered within the hour."

That was indeed unusual. Stonn hesitated for a moment, then turned to his colleague. "I shall return immediately."

The Chief Scientist did not reply, only began arranging tapes and notes in sequence for the next phase of planning. T'Pring, too, had left, silently following Stonn in case he required her presence.

Out in his private room Stonn selected his Elders' code; mere moments elapsed before T'Paren and Selir appeared on the screen. It was Selir who spoke.

"Son of my son, are you alone?"

"Negative. My Chattel is with me."

"The message concerns only the Clan," was the rejoinder.

Before Stonn could give T'Pring the order to leave, he heard the door close softly. "She has departed the room." He waited for T'Paren to specify.

"Your elder brother Steral has not reported in for more than one standard week, nor have any signals been received from his freighter within that period. The Starbase in the sector he had been scheduled to traverse has intercepted no messages either, and he was to have delivered supplies there. It is necessary to initiate a search. Do you also authorise the release of funds from Clan holdings to finance part of the cost?"

"Yes, my Elder." Stonn programmed his personal code into an annex which would make his part of the income accessible to the Elders.

For a moment he felt a surge of uneasiness. The route chosen by Steral was well frequented by traders and Starships on patrol, but was relatively close to the Neutral Zone. This fact encompassed the

possibility of sorties by the Romulans to capture Federation vessels for the sake of captives and technology. It was an admittedly rare occurrence, but disquieting nonetheless. Neither ships nor crews had ever been recovered. That Steral, who was as highly trained as any Starfleet officer, would accidentally enter the Neutral Zone was inconceivable. Any number of other incidents could have occurred as well. The T'Heavoc'arin had lost more than one member to deep space ever since venturing offworld as merchants.

T'Paren continued, "Should Steral be lost to the Clan, it will be for you to assume his place in the family and continue our tradition."

"I will obey," replied Stonn. He knew he had no other choice, and for a moment he suppressed rebellion against the fact that tradition could force him to give up his posting at the Academy.

"He is yet alive. T'Pirith has stated that the link is intact, yet so tenuous that his position cannot be traced with any measure of accuracy."

"He could be traced with her help. The bond is true."

"Indeed, but T'Pirith cannot be risked. The Seclusion has had a positive outcome. In order to trace the link we need an individual capable of functioning as its carrier/amplifier to focus on it and trace its source. The effectiveness of this method is dubious, considering the distances involved, but with all due consideration his ship cannot have been forced so far off course as to create incalculable odds against this procedure. It may be possible to reconstruct the route Steral has taken. By means of the link, he could be saved."

Stonn nodded. "A high telepathic potential is required for this work." He met his Elders' glance. "I offer myself. My rating is far above average."

T'Paren made a slight gesture of negation. "It is too great a risk for the individual concerned, and you are necessary to the Clan. You cannot be endangered. However, your Chattel is rated as being nearly as highly telepathic as you are, and she is expendable."

"Affirmative. Her rating is but two points below my own." Stonn suppressed his unease and the reluctance with which he anticipated the request which would follow.

"She is also healthy and resilient," continued T'Paren. "As she is Clan property she can be induced to serve us. In case of damage you will be adequately compensated. T'Pirith has agreed to this procedure. She confirms the fact that your Chattel can be trusted not to hold back in her efforts. Do you agree to this?"

"Yes." Stonn had to force out the word.

"Then come to us as soon as you can depart from your duties. T'Paren out."

Stonn pensively shut off the communications outlet before leaving for the main room. The request was eminently logical, and in no way conflicted with custom. T'Pring's ability could be of use to the Clan. Yet he felt reluctance; the proposed method presented serious risk. If the intermediary became too exhausted, or if the link was destroyed, total mental collapse and even death were

possible.

He relegated his concern to the back of his mind. His adherence was to his Clan, not to an article of property.

Upon leaving his private quarters Stonn saw T'Pring standing in the hall, and for a few moments their glances met as he walked past her. Her stance and her wide brown eyes expressed concern.

"I presume, Xenobiologist Stonn, but...is all well in your Clan?"

"You will be told later. For now I neither require your presence, nor do I have the time to specify."

Stonn well knew that she was no longer but property to him, and for a moment he doubted the logic of the Chattel Law. How could a sentient, intelligent being become another's property, with its mind and body totally placed in another's discretion, the whole being of this individual reduced by law to an entry in a Clan ledger, complete with its monetary value?

Stonn shook his head. A life for a life... it was the law. Within seconds he was fully involved in the details of the project at hand.

Some hours later the Chief Scientist departed and Stonn commanded T'Pring to prepare. This time they went to the home of his Clan by flyer to save time. Within minutes they arrived, and Stonn pressed the panel set into the heavy carved door to the road.

"I welcome you in the name of the Clan." After the briefest of greetings Stobek, his youngest brother, led Stonn and T'Pring into the main room, where the Clan Elders, along with T'Pirith and Healer Sarev, were waiting for them.

After greeting those present Stonn took a seat next to his parents; T'Pring, as was prescribed for Chattel, settled at his feet, and Stonn fleetingly touched her mind. Moments later he felt her draw closer to him.

Once again the discussion of the risk to the participants arose, and after a brief discussion Sarev concluded,

"My colleague Serkir will monitor the wife of Steral. I myself have been assigned to the search team, and can thus monitor the Chattel in question. A possible link rupture, while mainly endangering the intermediary, entails a risk for all. I have been told, Stonn, that your Chattel is of extensive use to you, and of considerable value as well." He looked at Stonn, who acquiesced.

"The procedure will assure that the wife of Steral will be under diminished stress, whereas Steral himself will only sense a brief intensification of the link when the triple joining is effected," continued Sarev. He turned to Stonn. "The woman is your property. Do you surrender your rights to her, for the time required?"

Stonn looked down at T'Pring. "Yes, but I demand she be spared unnecessary risks. It would be difficult to replace her adequately." To himself he thought, *It would be impossible.*

"And your Chattel? Any unwillingness to serve could hazard the procedure's success." Sarev looked intently at the girl's lovely, expressionless features.

"Chattel, reply." Stonn ordered.

"I will serve my possessor's Clan in accordance with my duty." Her voice was calm, and her eyes met Sarev's directly when she answered him.

"Then let us proceed."

The Healer rose and gestured at T'Pirith and T'Pring; together they left the main room. Stonn stayed behind with his Elders, deciding to wait until the link was formed.

T'Pirith, T'Pring and the Healer went into a small room where Sarev directed T'Pirith to lie down on a low bed and T'Pring to sit next to her. The two women's eyes met briefly in agreement, then both cleared their minds, readying themselves for the fusion.

After some moments Sarev touched the nerve points of T'Pirith's face, then of T'Pring's, his body tensing with concentration as he traced T'Pirith's link with her mate; at the same time he descended to nearly the same depths within T'Pring's mind. Before she was integrated into the linkage a seconds-long opening of minds occurred, and T'Pirith's eyes widened slightly as she saw T'Pring's thoughts before she raised her mental shields. Immediately T'Pring blocked her own mind from receiving any thoughts from T'Pirith before the fusion was dissolved and their minds once again drew apart.

After some moments of recovery the Healer stated, "Your respective privacy is assured, but the contact with Steral is now twofold, and the distance at which the link can be sensed has increased in proportion."

The Healer left the two women to themselves and went out to the group in the main room, saying, "The link was created without difficulty."

The others did not reply. There was no need to. T'Paren only said, "Departure will be tomorrow, at this time."

Stonn knew T'Pring was now no longer his responsibility, and he took leave of his Elders to return to the Academy, where he would rejoin his superior for the next phase of the experiment.

Back in the room where the linkage had taken place, T'Pirith considered T'Pring for the first time, looking at her more intently than she had done before. T'Pring, her eyes lowered, submitted to the scrutiny. The link sensitised her to the other woman, but as Chattel, it was not her place to speak. Without realising it, her expression took on an element of pleading, to which T'Pirith immediately responded.

"What is it that you desire, Chattel of Stonn?"

"To assure you that I will place my full efforts into my task of trying to find he who is your mate," was the girl's reply.

"That is your duty, but your assurance is accepted with gratitude." The cold words were belied by the flicker of warmth in T'Pirith's eyes. "You will stay with me until your departure."

During the hours before she left T'Pring, who was informally a part of Steral's household for this time, was permitted marginal interaction with the other Clan members before she was ordered to rest, and T'Pirith took her into her own rooms.

The next day was uneventful. By the time T'Pring and Sarev arrived at the spaceport the supplies had already been beamed up to the long distance shuttle which had swung into orbit an hour before. At beam-up the two were met by the search team, consisting of various specialists as well as a group of specially trained Peacekeepers. The Captain of the shuttle, Serel, greeted the new arrivals.

"I welcome thee, Healer Sarev. May our co-operation lead to a positive outcome."

He then showed Sarev to his quarters, and said, "The woman has been assigned quarters adjoining your own, and your property has already been brought here."

In her room T'Pring put away the few things she had taken along, then sat down on the edge of her bed. She would not really be needed during the first few days, but enforced inactivity would be decidedly unproductive. When she heard Sarev leave his cabin she quickly put on the maddeh and contrived to meet him in the corridor, where she adopted the stance of submission.

"Chattel of Stonn?"

"I presume, but... Is there any way in which I could employ my skills? I have been trained in astrophysics and xenobiology, thus could be of use until I am required to trace the link." She fell silent, inclined her head, and clasped her hands as was prescribed.

"I shall inquire. Return to your cabin."

Sarev met the Captain in one of the computer rooms, and after a brief discussion of procedure the Captain familiarised Sarev with the present situation.

"Healer Sarev, the security unit is in the process of checking findings pertaining to the ion trail that should mark the passage of the freighter."

Sarev nodded. "The added assistance of the intermediary should enable us to abbreviate the search."

Serel briefly considered. "The intermediary is one apart."

"Affirmative," said Sarev, "but she is considered trustworthy by the T'Heavoc'arin. When will you require her?"

"I cannot yet compute the time factor, but estimate it will be optimal to commence once we have entered the quadrant. Presently there are too many ion trails for us to determine precisely which one is theirs. The Chief Scientist is seeking to isolate the appropriate one."

Sarev knew of the difficulties involved. This first part of the route was heavily frequented by ships going by every week, or even more often. He then remembered T'Pring's request, and asked,

"Is there any way of employing the Chattel of Stonn? She studied astrophysics, and is now actively assisting her possessor in xenobiology. Her competence is unquestioned."

"Indeed. There is a secondary computer outlet, and she will be allowed to take readings and report anomalies. There will also be simpler tasks. My staff can thus devote time to more complex duties and additional research."

Sotev, a junior crew member, accompanied T'Pring to the bridge the first time and demonstrated the system. After having been assigned her tasks she began working.

The following days offered her relative freedom in spite of numerous basic duties during the long Vulcan standard work day. Her time off she spent in a light trance of repose before continuing work after a light meal, the same routine she had followed with Stonn, except that the rights he had granted her were invalid outside the privacy of his home.

Two weeks later the activity on the bridge became the Vulcan equivalent of hectic when the computer readout showed,

Entering quadrant where subject of search last registered.

Immediately all backup systems were activated, with bare seconds elapsing between the notification and the reaction of the crew. The announcement and subsequent changes were automatically recorded, thus eliminating superfluous verbalisation of procedures.

Serel turned to the Healer, who said, "The attempt at tracing will begin within four hours. No specific preliminaries are necessary - the woman is prepared."

"Acknowledged. She will take her place at the navigation console, so as to avoid delays in course changes."

Sarev went to T'Pring's quarters and saw that she was just coming out of a light trance. Within seconds of sensing his presence she opened her eyes and said, "I am ready, Healer Sarev."

The male inclined his head. "In four hours you will be required on the bridge." With that he left.

Alone, T'Pring tested the link and, satisfied that she could take her place in it easily, dressed in a loose robe and rebraided her hair to hang down her back. She then settled at her computer and scanned a tape before meeting Sarev and following him to the bridge.

"Your place is here," said Serel, and she took her seat at the navigation console, fully opening her mind to the link. Her main task had begun, and she concentrated, hardly moving for hours. The link was active and functional, but the distance was yet too great. During the long hours of telepathic effort no-one disturbed her except for Sarev, who monitored her periodically to avoid any unforeseen weakening on her part.

At one point T'Pring straightened and said, "Healer Sarev, I have felt activation." Seconds later, though, the girl shook her head. "It is gone again." To herself she thought, *I must establish contact. If I fail in this, and Steral is lost as a result, I can*

neither face my master nor his Clan.

Sarev approached her again. "Is the link functional?" he asked when he saw her press her hands to her temples.

T'Pring inclined her head, struggling to regain the brief flash of contact she had made. *I must make contact.*

When he got no reply Sarev only said, "I shall touch your mind." The Healer well knew of the hazards of overstrain. He had the responsibility for all three Vulcans joined in the link; even T'Pring was of equal importance at this time, though in case of a crisis he could shield the others from shock. But there was no weakening to be felt - only the deepest concentration, and the threads of the link.

He straightened and said, "All is as it should be."

T'Pring remained impassive as she continued tracing the contact, trying to project a mental call to Steral, and at the same time attempting to receive an image from his mind.

Scientist Soter readjusted his computer, and Serel enquired, "Ion trail?"

"Negative, Captain. There is a marginally higher concentration here, but at the same time instrumentation registers considerable fluctuation similar to that at the rim of an ion storm. The trail may have dispersed in the course of these past three weeks due to the instability of the general area."

In spite of the findings there was no resignation to be felt. The scientists continued their tasks; it would have been illogical to abandon this previously eminently successful method. Unlike what would have been the case on a Human-staffed ship, no irritation or carelessness arose despite the monotony of duties and the uneventfulness of the mission. The marginal link instituted at the beginning of the mission, and Vulcan equanimity, prevented that, and work continued at peak efficiency.

Some hours after the first mental contact T'Pring tensed slightly and dazedly turned to the Healer. "I have just felt renewed activation of the link, but the contact was too brief for directional tracing."

"But the contact is there." It was a useless statement, but it was encouragement of sorts.

Another week of concentrated effort passed. All the crew put in nearly unceasing work, and took only the shortest breaks. No-one wanted to hazard losing the least possibility of further contact. At the same time T'Pring felt the mental contact intensifying rapidly until it became relatively stable, and took on a pattern leading into one of the more dangerous areas of the quadrant, a system with its own permanent ion storms.

After the contact had faded for the fifth time T'Pring commented, "Some element is blocking the link. It appears to be a considerable disturbance which, because of its intensity, is acting as a thought shield." Her words suddenly became slurred, and her breathing uneven as she paled and slumped back in her seat.

The Healer quickly checked her, noting the first signs of

exhaustion, but there was no risk as yet.

"Chattel of Stonn, depart. Repose for six hours, then return after a meal," Sarev said in a low, gentle voice.

The girl left the bridge reluctantly, but was forced to recognise the validity of Sarev's order when she felt slight vertigo upon walking up the two steps leading to the turbolift.

"How many possible systems?" was the Healer's query after she had left.

"Thirty-five, of which sixteen are with planetary bodies," was the terse reply.

"Time required for search in case of link disruption?"

The Captain stated, "Five weeks minimum, with time calculated for detailed scans."

For some moments the two males stood facing the viewscreen, silently looking out at the myriad of stars against the blackness of space, before returning to their respective research.

Some days later T'Pring turned to the Captain and said, "Permanent contact has been established. There will be no more disruptions. Course change..." She looked over at the navigator and mutely pointed towards the screen, her eyes closed as she concentrated on direction. "The contact is weak, but stable, and originates from that point."

"Is it indeed Steral?" asked the Captain.

The question was justified, as telepathic Romulans had been used to entrap Vulcans more than once, and it had been thus that the T'Heavoc'arin had lost one Clan member six years previously. The ship itself had been recovered, but the crew and its freight had disappeared without a trace. Even the log had been erased, but in a way that made it clear that no natural cause had been responsible.

The girl waited some more hours, sustaining the contact, before projecting.

«Steral of the T'Heavoc'arin, I have mental contact with you.»

There was slight hesitation before a reply came. «I have felt the touch of an addition to the link.»

T'Pring sensed the element of mistrust and in turn projected, «I am the property of the Clan of the T'Heavoc'arin, entered in the ledger by the mate of Siluran, given to Stonn in restitution for his humiliation at Kal-if-fee.» As further proof of identity she projected images of occurrences only she could have known of, as they had happened in the privacy of the Clan.

There was no hesitation this time. «Chattel of Stonn, the contact is weak. Serenen and I will join minds to guide you.»

T'Pring knew that this could hardly be subterfuge, although the information could also have been drawn out of Steral's mind, or the projection guided by suggestion and the use of drugs. It appeared that Steral sensed the caution reflected through the link, for the contact was briefly peopled by various presences, those of the most



important members of Steral's crew.

¶No, these individuals cannot be forced to react so spontaneously,¶ she replied, and then, aloud, said to Captain Serel, "I am relatively certain the individuals are acting freely, without coercion, and are who they claim to be. Serenen is among them."

The Captain turned to the Healer. "Saller and T'Pir have a son named Serenen, who serves on Steral's vessel." He turned back to T'Pring. "Is our course still correct?"

She concentrated again, then doubled over, cradling her head in her arms, feeling tiredness overwhelm her as she briefly lost contact. Sarev immediately went to her with a stimulant; it was a great risk at this point, as the weakness would hit her doubly when it wore off, but she was only property, of no importance in contrast to those they were searching for. She had, in principle, already fulfilled her purpose.

She looked up at the Healer on seeing him approach and said, her voice little more than a whisper, "No, it was a blockage, no weakness on my part. We are on course. Contact is now constantly strengthening." T'Pring's eyes grew remote as she opened the link.

¶Steral of the T'Heavoc'arin, the crew of Steral and a rescue team are approaching. Give us your position.¶

¶System 1xF, fourth planet, southern land mass, 15,91/38, 746. Contact may again be disrupted. There is strong magnetic fluctuation in this system and around this planet. Our communications and sensor systems are nonfunctional.¶

In a low voice T'Pring passed the information on to the others, then added, "Position is reasonably precise."

Moments later preparations began. The Healer went over to the girl and looked down at her.

"Depart now, and do not report to the bridge for one standard day. Your time is at your own disposal during that period."

T'Pring rose, stretched with cat-like grace, then left for her cabin, gratified at her success.

Two days later the scout ship swung into orbit around the planet. Sensors and communications were not functioning properly, so the scientists on the team began to set up a field that would weaken or even eliminate the disturbance on board ship, to permit registration of more precise data. The Vulcan Science Academy had developed the shielding which would now have its field test.

In the briefing room a short meeting took place, and Serel said, "Severe atmospheric turbulence would place a shuttlecraft at too great a risk. The main ship is better equipped and more stable. There is no other possibility of reaching the planet's surface." He announced the names of those who would be in the party that would assist the stranded Vulcans in repairing their craft, then the group dispersed, each to his own preparations.

On the way down to the surface the crew were reduced to clinging to their chairs for support in spite of the safety clamps that had

snapped into place at the first sign of turbulence. It took over an hour to guide the scout craft to a safe landing, and it was all too evident that a shuttlecraft would have been doomed well before landing.

"Atmosphere 10% thinner than V-standard, breathable," announced Sertan minutes after they landed. This would facilitate their work greatly, so, gathering the necessary equipment, the landing party, including T'Pring, went to the exit and left the ship to meet the stranded freighter complement.

As his group advanced to meet the newcomers Steral, as leader of the merchants, stepped forward to greet the Captain.

"Your arrival is propitious. We had estimated 2.8 weeks of further repairs under primitive conditions before gaining the possibility of attempting departure. There have been no casualties in my crew, nor have there been any material losses."

The Captain inclined his head and replied, "What were the circumstances necessitating this landing and leading to the disruption of contact?"

"We were caught in a sudden ion storm which had not registered on our scanners due to the extremely high level of disturbances in this sector, which made it seem a surge of magnetism. Malfunction of instrumentation followed, and the asteroid belt further damaged the hull and the warp engines, though not seriously, thus obliging us to commence a partial overhaul and effect diverse repairs before attempting a lift-off and the return itself."

"Status of warp engines?"

"Repaired."

"Impulse?"

"We are presently effecting repairs."

Without waiting for orders four of the crew started back for supplies when the Captain replied, "We have all you will need to complete repairs." He had seen that some components had been reconstructed from scrap.

Semor, a technician, and his colleagues Sanden, Stalir and Samik, soon rejoined the others, and after a brief time the damaged elements had been packaged and labelled.

T'Pring silently went over to help carry them into the freighter. When storage had been completed she came out to find Steral waiting for her.

"Chattel of Stonn."

She turned to him, inclining her head very slightly, keeping her eyes lowered. "Steral of the T'Heavoc'arin, I greet thee. Thy mate is well, and the Clan awaits your return, brother of my possessor."

He looked down at the lovely young woman. "You made contact with me."

T'Pring, surprised that he should mention it openly, replied in a low voice, her cheeks showing the slightest hint of emerald, "I

regret the invasion of the link with thy mate. No-one else could be risked. I was the logical choice. Sarev's link, however, does not disrupt your privacy or that of your mate." She fell silent, and when Steral said no more she walked away to take up her duties.

Steral looked after her. *My distrust is illogical. Both T'Pirith and I know she cannot be judged only by her Kal-if-fee...*

Back in the scoutship T'Pring and two other scientists briefly discussed procedures for mapping and gathering samples. Close to the surface of the planet instrument functions were not impaired. As the crew would only be spending a day planetside, the scientists took a flyer to check as much of the planet as possible for resources and life forms. Results would be transmitted directly to the computer, where basic processing would be initiated at once.

When they returned at the end of the time allotted them, there was an update on the progress of repairs before Steral called T'Pring to assist his crew in running a quick check on the placing of goods and the adjustment of the gravity fields, which work done she was free to return to the scout. There, too preparations were in progress for the impending departure.

The freighter was the first to attempt lift-off; after some moments of tense waiting a cloud of dust rose, the freighter in its midst as it accelerated on its path through the atmosphere, closely followed by the scoutship.

From her place on the bridge T'Pring observed the process and closed her eyes for a moment. She had done her part honourably, and would have admitted to logical relief at the success of the enterprise.

As soon as the spacecraft were on their way she left for the science department, where she was assisting the others. To her relief she found she could concentrate without difficulty on cataloguing samples and analysing tricorder readings in spite of her exhaustion. Steral had closed the link, to all purposes deactivating it, making it far easier for her to work than had been the case before.

On the sixth day Captain Serel opened communications. "Calling Vulcan Space Central. Freighter K'anthir requests permission to assume standard orbit, and rescue mission craft Kartaal requests permission to land."

"We have been apprised of your arrival. Permission granted. Vulcan Space Central out."

Whereas the rescue team's ship was guided to a landing in one of the docks of the spaceport, the freighter remained in orbit. The landing on the planet had been an exception for the unwieldy ship. After Steral had beamed down to complete formalities he had his goods transported to the depot of the merchants of his Clan, where they would be inspected by the Imports Section of the spaceport's Peacekeepers. His presence was required but briefly - scanners revealed all necessary details. Steral was then free to join his Clan.

T'Pring and Sarev were waiting for Steral when he came back into the section of the transporter hall reserved for Vulcan citizens. He

told Sarev,

"We shall proceed. The Elders have been notified of our return."

He had parted from the rescue team after a short leave-taking, and the members of his crew had also dispersed, leaving for their respective Clan homes. On his way through the hall Steral saw his brother Stonn enter and come towards them.

Stonn permitted himself the slightest of smiles and said, "My brother, I greet thee in the name of the T'Heavoc'arin. We rejoice at your safe return."

"I wish thee peace, Stonn. I am indeed gratified at the positive outcome."

No more was said while they all walked out to the flyer. Stonn unobtrusively glanced over at T'Pring, who followed them, eyes lowered, her expression and stance neutral. He refrained from touching her mind because of the multiple link.

Minutes later they arrived at the city home of the Clan and entered it, Stonn leading his brother into the main room.

T'Paren greeted him in the name of all. "We are most gratified at your safe return," she said, offering him water in the old ritual of hospitality and acceptance, and then giving him the embrace of kinship.

Thus was he made welcome in the home of his Clan, and the relief that he had not been lost expressed. This done, he immediately gave his father an account of sales and purchases, to which Solek inclined his head in approval. After two hours all formalities were complete.

"The link must now be disrupted," said Healer Sarev, after conferring with Serkir, who had monitored T'Pirith. Steral rose and gestured to T'Pring to follow him and the Healers to his quarters. As was prescribed T'Pring took her place at the door in the posture of submission while T'Pirith calmly welcomed her mate. She had been able to follow the search via the link, and had thus been apprised of his return, but in spite of Vulcan control the couple's contentment at being together again was obvious.

"Let us proceed," said Sarev after coming out of a trance of concentration.

T'Pirith looked over at T'Pring and gestured to her to come over to the group. The two women lay down side by side and relaxed while Sarev touched their foreheads, carefully entering their minds to unravel the threads of the double linkage. There was a slight flash of pain at the severance, then both returned to awareness.

"Is your mind yours exclusively, and the link to your mate intact?"

"Yes, Healer Sarev."

"Chattel of Stonn, is there any residual contact?"

"No, Healer Sarev."

"Then rejoin your possessor, Chattel of Stonn. You are no

longer required." With that command Sarev turned to T'Pirith, whom he monitored once more before leaving.

T'Pring walked slowly through the hall, still slightly dazed from the dissolution of the link and the constant mental drain of the past weeks. Stonn was in the main room, conversing with his cousin T'Simeh, when she entered. T'Simeh had accepted a posting on Beta 3000 as part of her training in xenobiology. Her bondmate would join her there some weeks later as they had the same area of studies.

Both fell silent and looked up, then Stonn motioned T'Pring to sit near the door. *«It will not be long.»* Some time after he rose, and after the ritual phrases of parting ordered, "Chattel, attend."

She followed him out to the aircar, where he gestured to her to get in. On their way home he quickly looked at her. Apart from the slight droop of her shoulders there was not the slightest sign of the numbing weariness she felt, and she reacted with great interest when he told her about the results of the experiment, the outcome of which she had missed. It was her duty to keep informed so as to commence serving him as quickly as possible.

Upon their arrival he sent her to her room. T'Pring cleansed herself, selected a simple dress, then went down to Stonn, feeling her inexplicable unease fade in his presence. "I come to serve, Xenobiologist Stonn."

He looked at her from where he stood next to a hydroponics unit and shook his head, saying, "No, T'Pring, you must rest. The mental effort of the past weeks makes it necessary." He gazed at her until she turned away and left. Stonn only wondered at the tension in her stance and the reluctance with which she had left. Illogical - he had to keep her functional, it was his duty towards her as Clan property, and she knew it.

An hour later Steral contacted him. "All is well, Stonn. Is your Chattel undamaged?"

"Yes."

"My mate and I regret having deprived you of her services, but the results were positive," Steral continued. "Costs were lower than estimated by 42.6%, and will be paid off within the next two months."

Stonn made a gesture of acknowledgement. "It was my duty and my honour to assist in the search."

His brother then looked at him directly. "It may be wise not to leave your Chattel alone until the next four hours have passed. Sarev has cautioned me as to my mate. There may be temporary weakening of controls, or pronounced restiveness."

Stonn inclined his head and Steral closed contact. Opening the link, Stonn sensed T'Pring's suppressed unease. *«You may come.»*

She entered but moments later, and waited patiently for Stonn to speak to her.

"Are you capable of assisting?" How else to grant her what she apparently does require?

A mute nod and a flicker of gratitude in her eyes were her reply.

"Then remain," Stonn said gently as he motioned her to come over to where he sat.

T'Pring's relief was nearly tangible as she approached him. Stonn briefly considered a list, then gave her a container of minute fossils to prepare. Within minutes she was absorbed in cleaning, preserving and sorting them into categories; it was a menial task, but all she was capable of until the effects of the link severance had worn off.

Steral had given him the tapes with data about the planet he had been stranded on. Stonn was to duplicate them prior to distributing them among the appropriate departments. T'Pring had also taken samples, which now had to be processed. The Science Department would most likely suggest establishing a research base there, but that would be a problem for the Federation, which had already been notified by the Academy.

When he turned to T'Pring a few hours later she could see that the signs of carefully controlled tension had disappeared, and that he could leave her to her own devices. It was also very obvious that she was rapidly losing the fight against her exhaustion. Stonn went to sit facing T'Pring, who met his glance inquiringly.

"I shall depart for the Academy. You are freed from any further duties until I return. Rest." With that injunction he left, but not without having gently touched her mind in a gesture of near-affection that surprised the young woman into looking up at him directly, her expression open.

When he had left the lab T'Pring went to the latticed window overlooking the street and watched him leave as had become her habit. For some moments she tiredly leaned her head against the stone lattice, feeling its coolness against her skin, then she briefly closed her eyes and considered the past few weeks. In no way had it been a disgrace, the use that had been made of her, but rather an honour to have had that trust placed in her. It seemed as if after two years - a short time by Vulcan standards - there was a shift in the way some members of Stonn's Clan considered her.

Upon entering her room, she immediately saw the pay offered her for her help in finding Steral; a set of ornaments, highly intricate in their design and very valuable. T'Pring tensed slightly as she stared at them, feeling pain not only at this humiliation but also at her memory of what she had once read.

"A Chattel may save enough to buy its freedom and a place in society by means of rewards and gifts given for special services to its master."

In an unconscious gesture she touched the objects - they were aesthetically pleasing - but then she turned away, her hands tightly clasped as she said in a low voice, as if Stonn were present,

"I only did what I did to fulfil my duty towards the Clan of T'Heavoc'arin, not to gain a reward. I do not wish to purchase my freedom. All I desire is your full forgiveness, Stonn of T'Heavoc'arin, and that of your Clan."



JASMINE'S PET

by

Helen Davison

"Ah, here she is, my little beauty!" Chekov lifted the three feet long gold snake out of its shoe-box home.

"Is that what we all paid two credits for?" Uhura asked.

"For its food as well," Chekov admitted. "It's a mineral eater, so it is safe."

"What is it?" Sulu asked.

"An Elashian snake, and these crystals are its food." Chekov showed them the bottle of purple crystals.

"What are they?" Christine Chapel studied them.

"Potassium carbolite," Chekov announced as he secured the snake back in the box. "I have no idea where we might obtain more once they have run out."

"The lab has some," Scott replied. "Let me know when you need them, and I'll get hold of some."

"Where are we going to hide her?" Uhura asked.

"The botany lab," Sulu replied. "The girls never go in there."

They all agreed that would be the best place for the snake. Sulu left, taking her with him, complete with the instructions for feeding.

Nearly a month later Mr. Sulu called Chekov to the lab. He explained that they were out of food for the snake, and they still had another month to go before Jasmine's birthday. They also needed to find a bigger box for the growing gift.

"Better contact Mr. Scott," Chekov muttered. "He promised to get us a fresh supply."

Half an hour later Mr. Scott slipped into the Tech Lab and removed five grams of the much-needed crystal.

The crystals were discovered missing during a regular stock check. Mr. Long decided not to report the missing stock to the Captain, even though he thought it was possibly a clerical error.

A week later the supply of food was again very low. Mr. Scott tried to remove a bottle from the Tech Lab, but discovered that Jasmine had delivered the stock to another lab. Mr. Sulu had to resort to lifting a newly-made batch from the Tech Lab.

Again the stock was discovered missing, and this time Mr. Long did report to the Captain, as there was no doubt about a clerical error. The lab was thoroughly searched, and the crystals were not found.

The day after the Tech Lab search was Jasmine's birthday, and the five conspirators gathered in the main recreation room.

"Quiet, everybody!" Mr Sulu called, standing on top of a table. "Shall we all sing Happy Birthday to Jasmine Jamel?"

The room rang with the hearty singing of the gathered crew members.

"Now, since Jasmine and Rita have both given the Enterprise an extra boost in the Starfleet talent shows, it was felt that we should give Jasmine a special gift," Sulu continued.

Mr. Chekov approached Jasmine, holding a large shoe-box containing the Elashian snake. Jasmine looked in the box cautiously. The snake raised its head and looked at her with unblinking eyes, then to everybody's amazement it raised two crests, one on each side of its jaw.

Jasmine backed away, alarmed. "Thank you," she whispered, sitting down, afraid that her legs were about to give way. "Why did it do that?"

"I don't know - it never has before," Chekov answered her, puzzled. "I'll check with the instruction book." He put the box down on the table in front of the poor girl.

"What is it?" Rita asked, peeping into the box. The snake raised its crests at her.

"Why, an Elashian snake, lassie," Mr. Scott replied.

"So that's where those potassium carbolite crystals disappeared to!" Mr. Long said. "Jasmine, I'll make sure you get a constant supply of the snake's food."

"It doesn't say anything about raising the crests like that," Chekov muttered. "Sorry, Jasmine, I don't know the reason for that behaviour."

Nurse Chapel, who had been peering at the snake over Rita's shoulder, said, "I'll see what the zoological records in the computer have to say about Elashian snakes." With that she left them.

Mr. Chekov lifted the snake out of the box. Jasmine reluctantly took it, and the snake wriggled and slowly wrapped itself around her arm. Jasmine stroked its head, the crests lifted, and she stopped stroking it. Rita leaned closer to Jasmine, and the snake raised its crests at her as well.

Nurse Chapel returned. "Take a look at this," she said as she pushed a cassette into the terminal on the table. She began to read off the screen.

"The Elashian snake, inhabitant of the third planet of the Elashia star. Adults grow no longer than two metres. They are not

dangerous, being neither poisonous nor constrictor. Their staple diet is the crystal potassium carbolite, from which they get the distinct gold skin colour. The male can be distinguished by the crests on both sides of the jaw. These crests play a vital part in the courtship of Elashian snakes."

Christine shut the screen down. "So, Mr. Chekov, it seems the snake is a he, not a she."

"How was I to know?" He shrugged. "The shopkeeper assured me it was a girl."

Suddenly the room quietened as some music started. Roy and Mick appeared in drag and began to dance in mimicry of Jasmine and Rita's act. The rest of the crew were cheering, hissing along with a few "Get 'em off!" lines. Someone called out, "Give them another wriggle, Roy!"

Jasmine and Rita were in tucks of laughter at the sight. "We'll have to give these two a few lessons," Jasmine whispered to Rita. Rita agreed.

The two men came over and challenged them, so the girls stood up and danced the men's routine, only Jasmine added a head slide, which the pet snake on her arm echoed.

The whole room roared with laughter as Roy exclaimed, "I give up! How can I compete against a snake?"

Triumphantly Jasmine and Rita returned to their seats, the winners.

"What are you going to call him?" a yeoman asked.

"I haven't decided yet."

"How about Alfred?" came one suggestion.

"Alfred!" Jasmine looked shocked. "No, I think Eli the Elashian snake."

"Yes, Eli is much better," Christine approved. "Come on, girls, time for rehearsal. You have a competition in a few weeks." With that she ushered the girls out of the rec room. Eli was still on Jasmine's arm, and Rita was carrying his home.

They entered the girls' room, and Christine quickly locked the door. "I thought we were never going to get out of there. Here, Eli, let me have a good look at you."

She gently lifted him off Jasmine's arm, and he curled around her wrist. She ran a finger along his nose and up between his eyes. Eli blinked lazily.

"He really is beautiful. Maybe you could use him in your act sometime."

"We'll have to see. What do you think of Roy and Mike?"

"Typical of those two clowns. Why?" Christine asked Jasmine.

"Well, we had thought of training them a bit. Give their comedy routine a bit of polish."

"So that they'll compete against you?"

"No, they'll be able to use it if there are two contests too close together. They can enter one, and we the other."

"You'd better talk your idea over with the Captain first. After all, he's proud of what you two have done for this ship in these competitions, and he wouldn't like you to ruin your chances," Christine advised.

"Ah Christine, don't be a wet blanket."

"Eli will complement our new outfits." Rita changed the subject.

"I think it's time I went." Christine handed Rita Eli, who wrapped around her neck and rubbed against her chin. Christine left.

"Time we should be hitting the pillows, I think." Jasmine stroked Eli.

Rita handed him over and Jasmine gently laid him in the box. "He'll be needing a new home soon," she stated.

There was a buzz at the door. Rita opened it, to find Dr. McCoy outside.

"Happy birthday, Jasmine," he greeted her as he entered. He gave her a fatherly kiss on the forehead, still keeping his hands behind his back, then he produced a large specimen tank. "I finally managed to discover what the crew had bought for your gift. I know you'll find it useful. By the way, the Captain sends his best wishes."

"Thanks, Bones. Eli already needs it," Jasmine smiled.

"Don't worry if he grows any more. Just let me know, and I'll find a larger one for you. I heard Mike and Roy gave you a treat."

"They decided they couldn't dance against Eli when they challenged us."

McCoy chuckled. "Wish I could have been there - it must have been a sight. I must be off, girls."

After he had gone the girls went to bed. Jasmine switched the lights off.

"Hey, Jasmine! Can you see Eli?"

"Yes. My, how he glows in the dark." With that she went off to sleep.

The two girls were very busy in the days up to the competition. They spent their free time in rehearsal, and Eli was included in the act.

The Enterprise arrived at Starbase 10. Because of Jasmine and Rita's reputation they were already entered in the talent show.

On the day of the show the Enterprise was half empty of crew, as

many had taken shore leave to cheer them. Captain Kirk, Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy were in the seats reserved for the senior officers of the ships attending the Starbase. They were engaged in an intership rivalry with the Captain and First Officer of the USS Jupiter.

The show started, and the officers watched the contestants. Whispered remarks passed between the two Captains between acts. Finally Jasmine and Rita appeared.

"WOW!" Captain John Smith couldn't believe his eyes. The whole room was filled with cheers and whistles from the Enterprise crew.

"You show them, girls!" Roy yelled as the music started.

The dance was a new routine, and a little more daring. This brought forth more whistles from the Enterprise crew. Jasmine flashed them a smile and shimmied away. Suddenly the lights went out, and all that could be seen on stage was a glowing snake curled around one arm, and the various ornaments on the girls' costumes catching the small amount of light that remained as the girls danced with the music. The lights came on as they entered their finale.

Captain Kirk had been a little startled by the new act, but was pleased with the reaction. *Better that if you can!* he challenged his rival mentally.

Captain Smith shook his head with disbelief; none of his entrants could win after the Enterprise's act.

At the back of the hall another person had watched the act, and had been horrified by it. Commissioner Sue Pinster was part of the reason why the Enterprise was at Starbase 10. They would be taking her to her new post on Starbase 14. She strongly disapproved of the exploitation of women by men, and this was an example of such.

These girls come from the Enterprise, she thought. I will deal with them while I am on board. I don't know why the Captain allows two of his crew to behave in such a manner. Or maybe I do - after all, he is a man. With that she left the hall as the girls were receiving their prize.

The next morning Captain Kirk was called to the Starbase Commander's office.

"Ah, Captain Kirk," Admiral Marsh greeted him. "Commissioner Pinster will be here very soon, but I wanted a word with you before she arrives. You must try to keep those delightful Ensigns - what were their names? Ah yes, Jamel and York - out of her way. She complained to me about their act being indecent, and shaming their sex with their dancing."

"I don't think Jamel and York and the rest of my crew would agree with her. She has a very Victorian view of life."

"I agree. Keep those two out of her way - she intends to discipline them. It would be a shame to lose their act."

Sue Pinster arrived and introductions were made. Commissioner Pinster gave Captain Kirk one cold glance, and he sensed he would have to watch his step with this woman.

They beamed aboard the Enterprise, and he was thankful to hand her over to Yeoman Rand. As soon as the transporter room's door had closed he called up Uhura and got her to page Jamel and York, with instructions to send them down to sickbay. He could hear her paging them as he made his way there. He found Dr. McCoy and Nurse Chapel, and ushered them into the office.

"What's going on, Jim?" McCoy asked.

"I'll tell you once the girls arrive," Kirk evaded.

Christine went to look for them, and soon returned with them.

"There you are, girls," Kirk greeted them. "We have a problem."

"A problem?" Jasmine checked.

"Yes. Commissioner Pinster, whom we are taking to Starbase 14, saw your act yesterday and believes that you are exploiting your bodies."

Jasmine giggled. "I suppose we are, but as long as it is on the stage, what does it matter?"

"Precisely. That is why I control your performances, to protect you from serious trouble."

"So what's it all about, Jim?" the still baffled McCoy asked.

"I've been warned to keep these two out of sight while Commissioner Pinster is on board. So, girls, rehearsals in your room for the next month, and no classes. Regular keep fit for the other girls for a time." He held up his hand as the group were about to protest. "It's only while the Commissioner is on board. Well, that's settled. Now remember, girls, low profiles and rehearsals in your room only - and keep the music turned down." With that he dismissed them.

The Enterprise left Starbase 10 and headed for its new destination. Commissioner Pinster stood on the bridge watching the manoeuvre as the Enterprise left its parking place. Word had already filtered around the ship that she disapproved of the Enterprise's winning act.

Susan Pinster chose her moment. "Captain, a few days ago I saw two of your Ensigns dancing in a talent show. I was utterly shocked by their display. I would like to meet those girls, as I wish to have a word with them."

"I don't like people interfering with my crew. Jas... The two Ensigns haven't done anything wrong."

"I am concerned about the fact that they are..."

"They are not being exploited. I control their performances. They started dancing as a form of keeping fit." He hated having a public argument on the bridge.

"You control their performances?" Sue Pinster could hardly believe her ears.

"Yes, to prevent the men in my crew from taking advantage of their talent," Kirk explained.

"I don't know what to say." She turned and walked off the bridge.

Captain Kirk thought grimly, *Round One to me.*

The crew members on the bridge had listened to this exchange with surprise.

Jasmine and Rita's dancing a shocking display? Chekov thought. "What a narrow-minded woman!" he said to Sulu.

"A woman like that has tunnel vision," Mr. Sulu commented. "She only sees what she wants to see."

"That's enough, you two," Captain Kirk rebuked his crewmen.

Meanwhile Commissioner Pinster was heading back to her quarters, still shocked by Kirk's revelation. She was so deep in thought that she missed two Ensigns stopping to greet each other with a hiphurst.

Kirk controls their performances, she thought. Yes, it would stop them from being taken advantage of. She entered her room. *The corruption in the ship doesn't appear to be all that deep, she decided. I wonder who those two Ensigns are? Maybe I can get the doctor to reveal them to me.* With that thought she headed for sickbay, where she found Dr. McCoy.

"Doctor, could you help me?" she asked.

Dr. McCoy caught sight of Christine Chapel signalling behind the Commissioner's back. "That would depend of what sort of help you require," he stalled.

"I require the names of two Ensigns," she explained. "The two who entered the talent show two days ago."

"I'm sorry, I cannot reveal that sort of information," McCoy stated, crossing his arms.

"I suppose the Captain has left orders not to reveal their names."

"Not quite. As a doctor I don't reveal any names, except to the Captain."

"Thank you, Doctor, for your help." With that she left.

McCoy heaved a sigh of relief. "Thanks, Christine, for the warning. I'd better warn Jim that she is still probing."

A couple of days passed, and the Commissioner still had not had any success in finding the two girls. Everywhere she turned the crew closed ranks, and she could get no further.

Eli decided to roam. Jasmine entered her room after her day's duty to find him missing. She began to search. Rita arrived to find the cabin in disarray. Cushions and various garments lay in a heap in the middle of the floor.

"Jasmine, whatever is the matter?" she asked.

"Eli is missing," Jasmine replied, emptying out another drawer.

Rita began to fill the one Jasmine had just emptied. Once Jasmine had finished searching the drawers she began to help Rita tidy the room again.

Rita picked up the cushions. "Have you searched the bathroom?"

"Yes, and I ran a torch under the beds. I don't know where to look now."

"We'd better get someone to help."

"Who?" Jasmine asked.

"Dr. McCoy, that's who. He always knows how to deal with this sort of problem." Rita almost dragged Jasmine out of their cabin. "Better lock the door with our secret code. That way, if he is in there he won't get out."

During this time Eli was busy slithering through the air conditioning vents. A waft of perfume drew him to one opening.

In sickbay McCoy was trying his best to calm the situation down. He called Security, and two guards searched the room, but not as drastically as Jasmine had done. The doctor and the girls stood watching.

"Doc, I think I've found something," one of the guards exclaimed. They hurried over to where he stood by an air vent. The cover was hanging loose. "He could be anywhere on the ship by now."

"If he is in the air conditioning, it will be hard to find him," McCoy stated. Then an idea hit him. "Come on, you two, we're going to the bridge." With that he hustled them into a lift.

They arrived on the bridge to be greeted by Captain Kirk. "What's this I hear about Eli escaping?" he asked.

"We have a good idea where he is, but we need Spock's help to find him," McCoy explained.

"Where is he?" Uhura asked.

"In the air conditioning," Jasmine informed her.

"Ah, so you are hoping that Mr. Spock can locate him for you. Mr. Spock, can you help?" he asked, turning to the Vulcan.

"Yes. I am already trying to locate him," Spock replied without

looking up from his scanner. "I should be able to pick him up because of his diet of potassium carbolite. In fact, I have a trace in Deck 5's air conditioning. It should not be hard to pinpoint his precise position. At this moment you will not be able to get him. You will have to wait until he has emerged through a grid."

Eli continued to follow the waft of perfume. Finally he arrived at the grid through which the aroma entered. He poked and wiggled until finally he was through, and he began to slither around the room.

Uhura almost jumped out of her skin as a call came through to the bridge. She resisted the urge to remove her earplug and turned the volume down.

"Captain, it's Commissioner Pinster. There is something wrong, and she wants help in her cabin. I can't make any sense out of it - she's hysterical."

"Mr. Spock, Eli's present position?" Kirk guessed the reason.

"Eli is in the room assigned to the Commissioner."

Jasmine giggled. "He has got a thing about us ladies."

"You had better go and rescue both of them," Kirk sent her off.

"Do you think you're doing the right thing, letting Jasmine enter the lion's den?" McCoy checked.

"I think we'll get away with it this time. From what Uhura says she'll be only too glad to get Eli out of her room to recognise the girl sent."

Jasmine arrived a little out of breath. Timidly she buzzed at the door and it flew open.

"At last!" Sue Pinster heaved a sigh of relief.

"Where is Eli?" Jasmine asked.

"In there, Ensign, and get him out of here." She stood to one side at let the girl enter.

Eli took one look at Jasmine and raised his crests.

"Come on, rogue," she greeted him as she picked him up. "You've caused enough trouble, worrying me and half scaring the Commissioner to death, and all you can do is try to court me," she softly rebuked him. "He's quite harmless," she reassured the pale-faced woman.

"Just get him out of here," the Commissioner ordered, calming down.

Jasmine left and Uhura called her up to the bridge. She arrived with Eli wrapped around her arm.

"Ah, here is the runaway. Did you have any problems?" Kirk asked, stroking Eli.

"No, sir."

"So she didn't recognise you as being one of the dancers?"

"I don't think so, sir."

"Good. Off you go, you two," he dismissed her.

Commissioner Pinster lay on her bed thinking, *That girl - there was something familiar about her, but what? Her mind drifted on. That snake was obviously a pet. Honestly, this ship! If there's not one problem, there's another. Pet! This ship is alive with them!*

The next time she was on the bridge she chose that moment to have a word with Captain Kirk.

"Captain, how many pets are there on this ship?"

Captain Kirk looked at her, very puzzled. "I don't really know. Why?"

"Hadn't you better get a check on the situation before it gets out of hand?"

"Commissioner, this is my ship, and I don't think I need anyone to tell me how to run it." He tried to get the better of the situation. "My crew have been away from the comforts of home, and are at times under unknown pressures. Pets help to bring a little home comfort into their lives."

The Commissioner left the bridge, having lost another round to Captain Kirk.

Jasmine and Rita had finished another day's duty and they hurried down to the gym. They quickly changed into leotards, draped fringed shawls around their hips, and managed a few minutes practice before their class arrived. They had placed a notice on the main board advertising 'A Dance-Exercise Session', and had worded it so that the girls in their regular classes recognised it as their session.

The class began to arrive, and they split up into beginners and the more experienced. Jasmine took the advanced girls, while Rita led the beginners through their exercises.

Commissioner Pinster had seen the notice of the dance exercise session, and decided to attend. The session had already started when she arrived. Rita left her girls practising their hipslides and greeted her.

"You're new, aren't you? So you're with me." Rita led her over to her side of the room. "Right, girls. In time with the music. Right, Centre, Right. Left, Centre, Left. Come on, slide those hips. Like this." She showed the Commissioner. "Now twist them. Right, Centre, Right. Left, Centre, left. Work those knees." She pressed the girls on and showed the Commissioner each new step.

Jasmine had seen the Commissioner's entrance and Rita taking charge, so she continued with her group, teaching them small routines

and advanced steps. The music was a steady drumbeat.

Meanwhile Captain Kirk, Dr. McCoy and Nurse Chapel were worried. Christine had seen the Commissioner entering the gym where Jasmine and Rita were holding their class. She had wasted no time in informing the Captain.

Captain Kirk was furious because the girls had disobeyed the orders he had given them to protect them from the Commissioner. With Mr. Spock in tow he entered the gym. It took the two men a few minutes to find the Commissioner among Rita's class. Captain Kirk heaved a sigh of relief and the two men left.

"It looks as if they have got away with it," he told Dr. McCoy once they had returned to sickbay. He went on to describe the scene that he and Spock had witnessed.

Sue Pinster had enjoyed her lesson despite the unfamiliar steps.

Kirk decided to let the classes continue under the condition that the costumes remained leotards and shawls for the time being. Sue Pinster joined the classes as often as they were held, and was progressing as well as some of the other girls in Rita's class. Rita taught them a simple routine.

All too soon the journey was completed. Kirk heaved a sigh of relief, while the Commissioner regretted that the trip was now at an end.

Starbase 14 threw a dinner in honour of the Commissioner. The senior officers of the Enterprise, as her escort ship, were invited. The meal progressed pleasantly, and soon it was time for the special entertainment. Kirk winked at McCoy as the music started and the two girls appeared.

Commissioner Pinster froze. *Of all the sly tricks!* she thought, and then remembered her dance sessions. Shaking her head she began to laugh softly at how easily she had been deceived.

"I think Jim's got away with it," McCoy whispered to Spock.

The music stopped and Rita stepped forward with a shawl in her outstretched hands. "Care to join us?" she asked.

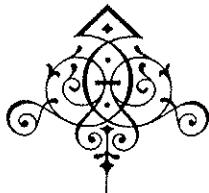
"But I don't know the music."

"Yes you do," Rita giggled. "Roy, play a bit and rewind."

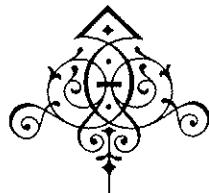
Roy obeyed, and Sue Pinster smiled. She stood up and tied the shawl around her hips. Roy reset the music and set it playing. Following the two girls, Sue danced with them.

There was a regretful goodbye from the Commissioner as the Enterprise prepared to leave. Jasmine promised to keep in touch with her as they had now become the best of friends. Sue Pinster often wondered how she could have been so prudish about the two dancers.

MIND MELD

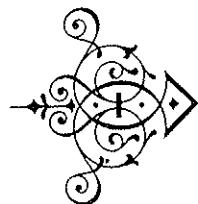
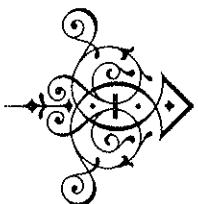


My mind is yours,
as is my will.
You touch my soul,
and time stands still.
You feel my emotion
like falling rain;
I feel your thoughts returned,
but now with no pain.



The pain that was
has now gone,
and as time stands still
our minds drawn near.
The mind meld is complete:
we are one.

J. Devlin



MY PLACE

Product of an alien world,
Lonely life was for me;
At home there, but not completely,
I journeyed to be free.

Life among the stars,
That's the life I chose,
Journeying to the unknown
As far as the universe goes.

Life aboard a starship
Is the choice I made.
Living among my mother's people
My loneliness began to fade.

Consort of a starship Captain,
That's what I chose to be.
My life is at his side -
There's no other place for me.

Maureen Frost



INTRUDER ALERT

by

Joyce Devlin

I was concerned. Being C.M.O. of the Enterprise it was my job to worry, but this time - though I could not quite put my finger on it - there was something wrong, and Jim was looking more than just the usual over-worked Starship Captain. The only thought that comforted me was the knowledge that if something was wrong with Jim he would have told me, of that I was sure. He was not a fool. With that thought I drifted into an uneasy sleep, although had I known that Jim was awake and unable to sleep due to an irritating cough I would have been more concerned than I was.

I woke to the soft buzzing of the computer alarm call. My first thoughts were of Jim, and I made a mental note to ask him what was wrong over breakfast - that was the one thing he never missed. That was, until that morning. There I was sitting in the mess hall sipping yet another cup of coffee, and still there was no sign of him.

It was then that the call came over the intercom.

"Doctor McCoy, please report to the Captain's quarters."

I gulped down the remains of my coffee and acknowledged the call before heading down the corridor. My first stop was sickbay to pick up my little black bag, and my mind was racing by the time I reached Jim's quarters. It was so unlike him to ask for a house call.

I knocked, and went in without waiting. Jim looked terrible, as white as a sheet, and he was still in bed.

"Bones, I feel hellish," he croaked as he tried to ease himself up in the bed.

"Lie still," I said as I ran the mediscanner over him, not liking what it was telling me. "Where do you ache?" I asked.

"All over, my head, arms and legs, and this cough is driving me crazy; every time I cough my head feels as if it's falling off."

"All right, Jim, it's just the 'flu you've got," I replied as I checked the reading on the mediscanner again. "You'll be in bed for a few days," and as an afterthought I added, "and no 'buts'."

"I'm not going to argue. I feel dreadful," Jim replied. That meant he was feeling really bad.

"Right. You probably picked it up last planetfall, and I only hope I don't have an epidemic on my hands," I said as I pressed a hypo home against Jim's arm. "That will help you sleep, and settle the cough." I didn't like what I witnessed next; Jim's whole body was racked with pain as he coughed violently.

"I think you'd be more comfortable in sickbay, Jim, where I can keep a close eye on you," I said once the cough had eased off.

Jim looked at me through watering eyes. "You're right, Bones, only I'll manage to walk. It's only down the corridor a bit, and a short ride in the turbolift," he said.

"No, Jim. You're in no fit state to get to the bathroom yourself, let alone walk down to sickbay. You'll only succeed in making yourself worse by getting your temperature up."

I was surprised there was no further protest as I alerted sickbay and asked for a medi trolley to be brought up to the Captain's quarters, and none whatsoever when I contacted the bridge.

Spock arrived down in sickbay just as I'd finished settling Jim in the side ward, so I ushered him into my office calmly, but I was anything but calm inwardly.

"Doctor?" Spock questioned.

"Jim has a bad case of 'flu. I'm running more tests to see what strain it is; until then I can only treat the symptoms, not the virus itself."

"How is he?" Spock didn't look too hot himself.

"How are you is more to the point. You don't look too good - rather washed out, in fact." I had the mediscanner out and was running it over the Vulcan, much to his annoyance.

"I am functional," was Spock's reply.

I've never liked that response. As far as I'm concerned it means 'I'm okay - just.'

"Spock..." I put an edge into my voice, but there was no need. Spock swayed, and I only just managed to catch him. He was hotter than hot, even for a Vulcan.

"Nurse Chapel!" I yelled, and my Head Nurse came running. She took in the situation at a glance, and had the bed next to Kirk's turned down. With her help I managed to get Spock stripped and bedded.

Leaving Nurse Chapel to settle Spock I made my way to the intercom as I needed to let Scotty know what the situation was. I only hoped he wouldn't fall down on me next. Come to think of it, I wasn't feeling too good myself, so in the privacy of my office I swallowed two pills. The uppers took immediate effect, and I soon felt better - well, I would be on my feet for the next 24 hours or so.

After talking to Scotty and putting him in the picture I had several house calls to make. M'Benga had been up all night, and was now off duty; his report read 10 house calls, all with 'flu-like symptoms. Oh boy, I thought, I've got an epidemic on my hands.

By the time I got back to sickbay there were another 15 reported cases, 5 serious enough to warrant them being admitted by Christine Chapel in my absence, which gave me a total of 40 crew down with it.

The crew were dropping like flies; my own head hurt something wicked, and I wasn't thinking straight, or I would have seen it

sooner. As it was I got Uhura to put a call through to Admiral Ross, head of Starfleet's vast medical association. No doubt she would order us to the nearest Starbase and base hospital under the yellow flag of quarantine. *This shouldn't be happening to me*, I thought.

"You're through to Admiral Ross," Uhura informed me as she put it through on visual.

The face of Admiral Kay Ross appeared on the screen in front of me. She hadn't changed much - maybe a little older, maturer.

"Len, we don't hear from you much," she started, "so the problem must be serious for you to call us. What's up?"

"It looks like I have a 'flu epidemic on my hands, Kay. I have 40 down with it, including the Captain and the First Officer," I reported as I transmitted the data to her on the medical computer.

"The Vulcan? No wonder you sound worried. Len, are you all right? You don't look too good."

"I'm fine. Look, I know it's only 40 down out of 430, but that's in just 24 hours."

"Your ship had better come in under the yellow flag. You know the drill. Proceed to Starbase 13. I'll meet with you there, and I'll alert the base hospital to stand by to assist if need be. And Len - don't be a martyr. Delegate." Kay Ross was concerned.

"You've got a point, Kay. Cut the orders and transmit them from your end, and I'll see to this end, okay?"

"Very well. Starfleet out."

With that she closed down the link, and I could imagine the speed with which she set the orders in motion. The Enterprise was soon under quarantine and en route for Starbase 13, the best spacefield hospital in the galaxy, which would have been placed on alert.

I stepped out of the office and into sickbay. M'Benga was standing at the foot of Jim's bed, watching the diagnostic panel. Even to the inexperienced eye it was clear there was something more wrong with the Captain than just a mere dose of the 'flu.

"Some 'flu," he commented as he moved to the foot of Spock's bed. "What's up with him? Terran 'flu shouldn't affect a Vulcan," he said as he moved off for some equipment.

"I don't know as yet - and you should be off duty," I snapped.

As I crossed back to study Jim's readings I realised there was a different feeling about him.

M'Benga was at my side. "Leonard, watch it!" he shouted.

I sprang into action as Jim moaned and curled into a tight ball, rolling over. I caught him before he fell from the bed. The pain level had shot up.

"We'll have to restrain him to keep him from breaking anything," I said, not liking what I saw one bit.

"Bones!" Jim gasped.

"It's gonna be all right," I replied, not at all sure that it was. One thing was for sure - this should not be happening, but it was. There was something more, and I couldn't place it.

"Bones..." Jim was trying to tell me something. I leaned closer, keeping a hold on him as M'Benga tied the restraints.

"Easy, Jim."

"Had this before..." he gasped again.

"What? When?" My mind was racing; the symptoms the same, but not the same.

"Vegan Chorio..." He didn't get time to finish as another spasm of pain racked his body.

"It can't be, Jim," I said as I ran the scanner over his body again.

The readings were totally different from those of the morning, so I took some more blood samples and set to work. There was nothing I could give him until I was sure. Why does it always happen to this doctor?

I was going cross-eyed, and I needed a cup of coffee badly as I straightened myself up from the microscope. Much to my surprise one appeared from nowhere at my side. I looked round to find a young nurse standing there.

"Doctor McCoy, I thought the Captain had had the 'flu vaccine, the same as Mr. Spock?"

"What was that, Nurse?" I asked as Chris took over from me at the microscope.

"I was on duty last week, sir, when Mr. Spock came in for the 'flu vaccine as you had issued orders for everyone on board to receive it. I'm sure the Captain was just behind him, because we had to open another batch for him."

My mind was racing. "Oh my god!" I said as I put the coffee mug down.

"I've found it!" Christine shouted in triumph.

I peered over her shoulder. There it was, floating around in the last blood sample I'd taken, attacking the white blood cells and destroying them.

"The 'flu vaccine you said, Nurse. Get me the batch - and be quick!" I ordered. "I want a blood analysis from everyone who received a dose from the same batch as the Captain."

I had no sooner issued my orders when the vaccine vial was handed to me. Carefully I placed a small drop onto a slide and eased it under the microscope... and there they were, swimming around merrily, Vegan Choriomeningitis microorganisms, along with a live 'flu virus. So the 'flu had hit Jim first, then in his weakened

state the other had pounced. My mind was racing wildly.

"I'll need antibiotics and painkillers. Chris, you check those other vials, please," I asked, not adding the thought that I only hoped we were in time with the antibiotic.

Five minutes later I had administered the injections to Jim, and for the first time since I had admitted him he slumped into a painless sleep. For that I was grateful.

When I finally went back into the workroom Chris had checked the last vials, and had found that they did in fact contain the live 'flu virus, so that explained our outbreak, but not how the Vegan Choriomeningitis organisms had got into the vial. I wondered if it was pure coincidence, or deliberate. I knew that Starfleet had said this was a new type of vaccine, but the question still needed answered, how the hell did the live microorganisms get into it? I lifted all the other batches off the shelf and plonked them down in front of Christine.

"Check that lot, please, Chris," I said as I lifted the vial with one dose out of it and took it through to the safe in my office. If my suspicions were right someone on this ship had just tried to kill Jim Kirk, and very nearly did. Now I was on the warpath.

Lifting my coffee mug I took a mouthful of stone-cold coffee. Ugh! It wasn't until I glanced at the clock that I realised it was almost midnight. How quickly the day had flown - but then it does when one has an emergency on one's hands.

"Doctor, those other vials are clear," Chris said as she poked her head round the office door. "Do you want a hot cup?" she asked as she noticed the coffee mug sitting on my desk.

"Yes, I wouldn't mind after I check on the Captain. And Chris?"

"Yes?"

"Thanks for everything today," I smiled and added, "It's almost midnight - you'd better turn in."

"I will as soon as I get you that coffee." With that she whacked the empty cup off my desk and left.

I checked on Jim then to satisfy myself before I got the watch communications officer to put me through to Starfleet Command and from there to Admiral Ross on her shuttle. It took a while before Kay Ross's face appeared on the visual monitor on my desk, and she did not look too pleased at being summoned at one in the morning - like I said, it had taken a while for the call to travel.

"This had better be damned important, Dr. McCoy!" she barked at me.

"It is. I believe someone has tried to kill my Captain," I stated. I was not being very diplomatic about it, but I was afraid.

"What? How?"

"That vaccine you lot sent me. Well, 26 vials contained a live 'flu microorganism, and one contained live 'flu and Vegan Choriomeningitis. I've checked the rest of the batch, and they are

clear. Hence our 'flu outbreak."

"I see. And Jim Kirk?"

"Is now sleeping peacefully, thank god."

Spock stood in the doorway, looking rather pale but otherwise all right. "The question is, how did the microorganisms get into the one earmarked for the Captain?" he asked.

"Spock, you should be in bed," I said as I stood up.

"Doctor, I am quite recovered."

"Who's the doctor around here?" I asked.

"Doctor, let Mr. Spock stay," Admiral Ross ordered. "This matter is serious, and I may have some light to shed on it. I had a report some three months or so ago that a vial containing Vegan Choriomeningitis went missing from our research centre on Jindarra."

"And you believe that it's the same lot that contaminated the 'flu vaccine here?" I questioned.

"Yes, I do. Now fill me in. Have you checked the rubber sealant for needle marks?" Ross asked.

"No, not yet. I haven't had the time."

"Who administered the vaccine to the Captain?"

"Dr. Marric, but we left him at Starbase 13, our last stopover, as he had been transferred."

"Where is the vial?" Spock asked.

"In my safe. You know the code," I told him.

Spock brought the vial, and carefully examined it as the Admiral and I waited patiently.

"There are three pin holes, one I believe made today, the other two..."

Spock was interrupted by the Admiral. "One by Doctor Marric, and one by someone else, I should imagine. It's just a pity that this particular vaccine is made in such a way that it has to be drawn up by the old needle method before being transferred into a pressure hypo. Right, I want a departmental investigation started, and I will beam aboard as soon as we reach Starbase 13, which should be in around..."

"Four point five hours," Spock supplied the necessary information.

"Right. Now if you don't mind I'll get back to my bed, as I should arrive in orbit ten minutes before you - and Leonard, I suggest you get some sleep too," Ross said as she stood up.

"Not while Jim's still in danger," I retorted.

"Very well, Leonard. There's no use talking to you, is there? Futura shuttle out."

I sat and stared at Spock, not quite knowing where to start. "Who'd want to kill Jim?" I finally asked.

"Doctor, I would like to know how they knew that Jim would be the next one for the vaccine," Spock said.

"You think someone in my sickbay is involved?" I asked, not liking the idea.

"Or someone who has access to the cold shelf in the cabinet," Spock continued.

"I can't agree with you, Spock. Who in the medical team would want to kill Jim?"

"I did not say the medical team, Doctor. I merely asked who would know that Jim was next in line for the vaccine - you drew your own conclusions," Spock replied, raising his eyebrow to his hairline in his customary way.

"Anyone who was standing in sickbay that day would have known who else was around," I said, dismissing the thought that any of my staff were involved.

The door of my office opened as Chris came in with two steaming cups of coffee.

"Why don't you turn in, Chris?" I asked as we took the mugs from her.

"Yes, Doctor, I will, only call me if anything else happens, please."

"You can count on that. Good night."

"Good night."

Once Chris had left the office I spoke again about the attempted murder. "Spock, those vaccines are not kept under lock and key. Anyone could have got at them."

"Then what about the list? It had to be someone with some sort of access."

"Spock, there was no list. Marric only wrote down the names of those he had given the vaccine to, and the vial number. That's how we knew Jim had received a dose from that particular vial."

"I see. So it would have to have been done just before Jim was vaccinated; therefore the person responsible would have had to have been in sickbay at the same time as the Captain," Spock deduced.

"So the question still remains, who would know that that particular vial was going to be given to Jim," I said as I swallowed two pills in front of him. "I need something to keep me going," I added, answering the look of disapproval Spock was giving me at that moment.

"But pills are..."

"No substitute for sleep, and no doubt I'll sleep for a week at the end of this."

Just then the young nurse who had given me the lead in the first place came into the office and told us that the Captain was awake and asking for Spock. She also informed us that his temperature was returning to normal. When we reached the side ward I was glad to see that the diagnostic panel readings were down and still falling slowly. Jim looked at me questioningly as I undid the restraints that were strapped over him.

"How do you feel?" I questioned.

"Horrible, like I've been pulled through a hedge backwards," he replied as his eyes found Spock.

"Any pain?"

"Only in my head. Bones, what hit me?" he managed to say.

"Well, the 'flu first," I said, trying not to worry him.

"And?"

"All right, you've also had another attack of Vegan Choriomeningitis," I told him; I'd made it policy never to hide anything from him a long time ago.

"How?" He struggled to sit up.

"The vaccine, Jim."

"What?"

"The 'flu vaccine, Jim," Spock repeated.

"How?"

"It looks as though someone just tried to kill you," I told him.

"You're joking!"

"The doctor is not joking," Spock said as he sat on the edge of Jim's bed.

"It's no joke. The ship is en route for Starbase 13 and under the yellow flag," I replied. Well, it was his ship, and he did have the right to know the whole truth.

"All right, you two, you know the drill," Jim answered as he swung his legs off the edge of the bed.

I let him, as I knew what would happen; he would be unable to stand without feeling dizzy for a few days. Spock caught him as he suddenly sat down on the bed, his legs giving way under him.

"Let that be a lesson to you, Jim. You're going to have to stay in bed for a few days, and let us do the worrying. Admiral Ross will be boarding shortly, so get some sleep until then," I told him, turning back to Spock.

"Right, let's get you back to bed as well. Anyway, I'd feel safer knowing you were in here beside Jim for the night."

"Yes, you have a logical point, Doctor," Spock replied, and I nearly fell through the floor; I'd at least expected some kind of

argument from him.

"Back to bed, Bones? What's going on?" Jim asked, alarmed.

"Just a 'flu outbreak, Jim - nothing to worry about. Now sleep, and let me nurse my headache in peace and quiet."

I stayed around until the panel told me Jim was asleep. In two hours and thirty minutes the heavy squad would be aboard the Enterprise, and I needed to have more data to hand. The young nurse moved silently through sickbay to where the duty nurse sat with one trained eye on the ward, the other on the panel boards.

"Nurse Chalmers," I said, recalling her name.

"Doctor?"

"That day the Captain received the vaccine - tell me about it, please," I asked quietly.

"There's nothing much to tell, sir. I was helping Dr. Marrie with the routine job, and I had just turned to see who was next when the Captain came in looking for you. I told him you were off duty, and he asked for the vaccine. I went to the cabinet and removed a new vial from position 1, as it was a new tray. I remember commenting to the doctor that it felt different."

"Felt different? Please explain."

"Well, when you've been working with the vials all day you get accustomed to the weight. This one seemed different, heavier, but the doctor didn't think so and went ahead."

"Who was in sickbay, Nurse?" I asked as Spock entered the ward.

"Only Dr. Marrie, Mr. Spock and myself before the Captain came in, sir," she told me, then it seemed to dawn on her. "Wait a minute, there was someone else. He said he had a headache, and Dr. Marrie told him to help himself to two pills from the cabinet - the blue bottle on the top shelf. I knew... I knew there was something that had been bothering me all day."

"Any idea who it was?" I asked, knowing I was hoping for a miracle, but there was a slim chance.

"No, sir. I only had a glimpse of who it was. If only I had lifted the other vial when I was suspicious! I'm sorry, sir - it's my fault the Captain nearly died," she said as the tears rolled down her face.

"It's not your fault, Nurse, you were only following instructions from your superior," Spock said. "You have been more than helpful."

"As Mr. Spock said, Nurse, it was not your fault, and no-one blames you for what happened."

"Doctor, a word in your office, please," Spock said.

"I'll be along in a minute, once I've checked on Jim," I replied, heading for the side ward.

"The Captain is sleeping peacefully at the moment," Spock told

me.

I'll never get used to that bond that's between them; it wouldn't surprise me one bit to find that Spock had been mirroring Jim's symptoms.

"That may be so, Spock, but I nearly lost him today, so bear with me - I just want to make sure he's okay," I whispered, adding, "I care for him too, you know."

"I know," Spock replied as I entered the side ward where Jim lay sleeping.

Once I'd checked the panel above the bed I was satisfied that Jim was on the mend. I turned from the bed, and that was when it happened. I was vaguely aware of someone standing in the shadows. He was quicker than I was; he sprang, and I landed on the floor, flat on my face as something hit me hard on the back of my head.

"Spock!" I cried out as the lights went out all around me.

I remember nothing else until I woke up on the bed next to Jim's with Spock, Dr. M'Benga and Nurse Chalmers standing over me.

"I'm all right," I said as I struggled to sit up. "Jim?" I hardly dared to ask, thinking better of sitting up owing to the dizziness washing around me again.

"How's your head, Bones?" the voice said from the next bed.

I relaxed; my head was throbbing something wicked, but Jim was okay and that was the main thing.

"How is your head, Leonard?" M'Benga asked.

"Sore - how the hell do you think it feels after bring thumped from behind?" I snapped.

"Doctor, did you get a look at your assailant?" Spock questioned as I became aware of two redshirts standing in the doorway.

"No."

"Doctor, think. What did you do when you came in?" Spock asked.

"I stood at the foot of Jim's bed looking at the panel, then I turned to leave. Next think I knew I was hit over the head and the lights went out."

"So who the hell is trying to kill me?" Jim demanded weakly.

"That's what we're trying to find out."

"I have placed Security on alert," Spock reported.

I wasn't about to spend the last hour before our arrival at Starbase 13 lying on my back, so gathering my reserves I sat up and swung my legs off the bed.

"Leonard, please," M'Benga pleaded. "That was a nasty bang, and you have a concussion."

You could say his voice fell on deaf ears. I was so angry with

myself for not being quicker. "Who's the senior ship's surgeon around here?" I growled. I knew he was right, but it was my department, and Jim was my patient and friend - I had to be functional, to coin a Spock-type phrase.

I must remember never to turn my back on Spock, for the bloody lights went out again. I could hear them talking through a haze.

"Spock?" M'Benga said as I felt myself lifted back onto the bed.

"He will be all right, Doctor. I only applied enough pressure to induce semi-consciousness," Spock was saying. In other words, he had managed to paralyse me in such a way that I could neither move nor talk, but I could still hear what was going on.

"He'll kill you for using that on him," Jim said as the voices started to fade.

"The good doctor will be quite recovered before we reach Starbase 13, Jim." Spock's voice was the last one I heard as I must have drifted into sleep.

When I awoke next there was no-one around. Jim was sleeping, I could tell by his deep and even breathing. gingerly I sat up, and was relieved to find that I didn't feel dizzy any more, although my head still hurt.

The two security guards were still on the door. I was glad to see them, yet it meant whoever was trying to kill Jim was still at large.

Finding my feet, I crept out and through to my office. I needed a change of uniform, as I'd lived in the present one for almost 28 hours now, so I took the time to shower and change in my rest room, feeling more human afterwards.

When I stepped out into sickbay I noticed the security men on the main entrance. Well that was something at least - it meant that all IDs would be checked before anyone was allowed to enter sickbay.

I had a sneaky feeling I would find Spock on the bridge, and I did. He was sitting in the centre seat signing papers and looking rather strained and tired, which wasn't surprising. I didn't fancy being in the shoes of the guilty person when Spock got his hands on him. Usually Spock is cool, calm and collected - that is, until Jim's life is threatened; then he is totally unpredictable.

"Spock," I said, forgetting all about the episode in sickbay.

"I trust you are fully recovered, Doctor?"

"Yes, and it looks like I'm going to have to do some workouts in the gym," I remarked dryly; I didn't relish the thought of being thrown around one bit.

"Approaching Starbase 13, sir," Sulu reported.

"Lt. Uhura, establish contact with the Starbase," Spock ordered.

"Jim's still sleeping," I said, beginning to feel uncomfortable and useless on the bridge. Spock somehow always manages to make me

feel like that; I guess it's because he once told me that my place is in sickbay, not on the bridge.

"I know, Doctor," Spock replied.

"Starbase 13 commander on line, sir," Uhura reported as she established contact.

"On main speakers, Lieutenant," Spock replied.

"Starbase 13 command station. Go ahead, Enterprise," the voice came over the speakers.

"Request permission to dock," Spock asked.

"Permission granted, sir. Docking procedure countdown activated. Proceed to berth 6. Admiral Ross's shuttle will arrive inside 30 minutes. Starbase 13 out."

Once the formalities were over I asked, "Any luck with the Class 1 security search?" I had assumed Spock would have ordered one.

"No."

"Then perhaps you should get Security to start again," I said tartly.

"Doctor, Security is in the middle of a full Class 1 sweep, with a second team sweeping the same area at half-hourly intervals."

"Thus not allowing whoever it is to double back. Nice touch, Spock." I was feeling a little happier. "I'll be in sickbay if I'm needed."

On the way back to sickbay my mind raced. If there were two searches going on where the hell was he hiding? Or was he hiding? If Security didn't turn up anything then that left us back at square one. Two things were certain: it had to be someone who knew the ship well; and someone who knew about medicine. If it was one of the ship's own personnel, then who fitted that category?

My mind was still racing when I left the turbolift on Deck 7, and as I rounded the corner the scene that greeted me abruptly brought me back to reality, for a young nurse pushed her way past me covered in what looked like breakfast cereal, and I could hear Jim before I saw him.

Oh boy, I thought as I sailed into the side ward under full steam. I knew only too well what had happened. They say us doctors make the worst patients; however, I beg to differ. Starship Captains do. As I strode into the room I stepped on cereal spilled all over the floor, and went sailing right on my ass. I felt like a prize fool sitting there on the floor, with Jim trying hard not to laugh at me.

"Bones...are you all right?" he asked.

"I'll give you all right!" I said as I stood up rather painfully; I'd managed to jerk my back, and it felt like a pulled muscle. "What's the meaning of throwing your breakfast at my nurse?" I demanded to know.

"I said I didn't want it, and she literally tried to force the

stuff down my throat. I didn't exactly throw it - it sort of fell into her lap as I knocked the spoon away."

Jim looked like a little boy with sad hazel eyes. I wasn't about to be soft-soaped by them - not this time. I was too damn angry.

"I don't care, just don't do it again, you hear?" I told him, adding, "They have a difficult enough job as it is without you adding to it. As it is, every time you land in here you make it ten times more difficult." I winced in pain as I sat down on the edge of his bed.

"Are you all right?" he asked, concerned.

"Between last night's attack and this, no, I'm not. My back isn't what it used to be. Anyway, how do you feel this morning, and do you have any idea who would want you dead?"

"All right. Can I get up?" he asked, giving me one of his pleading looks, only this time it didn't work.

"Nope. You can stay right where you are, Jim, where it's nice and safe. Understand?" I said as I stood up. I had work to do, and I needed a clean pair of trousers before the Admiral was due aboard.

I looked at the clock, knowing that if I was going to make the transporter room in time I needed to get my skates on, so I left Jim in peace and hurriedly changed my trousers again. As I bent down to haul them on I winced in pain; I had hurt my back good and proper. I made a mental note to get M'Benga to have a probe at the places I couldn't reach.

I was glad that it was Transporter Room 4 that the Admiral would be using, as it was only a short way down the corridor right next to the chapel. As it was I arrived just in time to witness the Admiral shimmer into life.

Admiral Kay Ross stepped down off the platform, followed by her assistant. I stared in disbelief.

"Commander Spock. Doctor McCoy," she greeted us.

Boy, was I glad she kept her voice formal and didn't throw her arms around my neck like she had done the last time we met!

"This is my assistant. I believe you know each other?"

She was right; I did know her - very well indeed.

"Joanna!" I said, hardly believing my own eyes.

"Dad!" Joanna said as she came into my arms.

"I thought I would surprise you, Leonard, and bring her along."

She was right, she had. As I disentangled myself from Joanna the Admiral headed for the door.

"So you found the source of the 'flu epidemic. And Jim - how is he?" Admiral Ross asked as we entered my office.

"Fine when I left him. He was like a bear with a sore head."

Spock threw me a look I had come to read over the years. It was an unspoken warning not to say too much, and as usual I ignored it.

"Oh, Dad!" Joanna was saying. "Captain Kirk? I can't believe it!"

"Well, you try and nurse him," I retorted.

"I take it Jim is being his usual self when he's laid up," Ross said. I'd forgotten she'd been Chief Medical Officer on one of the ships Jim had served on. "You could say he's a pure pain in the..."

"DOCTOR!" Spock cut in.

"...neck. Yes, I do know. I remember the time when he was shot with a bullet on a landing party. I had him in sickbay for a week. Let me see... yes, he was just a Lieutenant-Commander then, and believe you me, I can sympathise with your poor ears."

"Yes, of course, Admiral, you were C.M.O. on the Hood when Jim was assigned to her."

"Yes, that seems so long ago now... Well, Doctor, has anything else happened since you woke me up?"

"No."

"Mr. Spock?"

"Our Class 1 search has failed to find anything, and I have Security on intruder alert status," he informed her.

"Yes, I can see that by the number of redshirts about."

"Here's the report you asked for. All the data is in it," I reported as I handed her a computer disc.

"And the vial?"

I went to the safe and removed it. Now it was in her hands, and was her responsibility. Ross took it from me and held it up to the light.

"Now I'd like to see Jim Kirk," she said as she stood up.
"Doctor?"

I got the message - she wanted me to lead the way. We had only just got outside the office door when Chris Chapel came backing out of Jim's side room.

"That does it, sir. You are being a pure pain in the neck," she let rip.

Oh Lord, I thought, not my Head Nurse as well!

"Just you wait until Dr. McCoy hears about this."

"Nurse Chapel," I said as sternly as I could. *It's a good job Kay knows about Jim, I thought, or I suspected he would be on report.*

"Doctor, I have been trying for the last half hour to get the Captain to take these pills."

"Okay, Chris, give them to me. It's just part of his recovery. Look, go and read the computer disc on my desk top - it tells you all about the after-effects of Vegan Choriomeningitis and what to expect. No doubt these pills are making him feel very uptight; that's just part of their side effects."

As I stepped forward to enter the side ward I was stopped by the security man on duty.

"I'm sorry, sir, my orders are to check everyone's ID before I let them through."

I grunted as I handed him my ID disc, but I was pleased to see he was doing his job. The Admiral and Joanna produced theirs, as did Spock.

Once he was satisfied the guard stepped out of the way and the door opened. Jim was sitting up signing some forms. I wasn't too pleased about that.

"All right, Jim, put that pen down. You're meant to be resting, not pen pushing. And here, take these. NOW!"

Jim looked up at me, and saw the Admiral and Joanna. "Kay!"

"In the wars again, Jim?" Ross asked. "You don't know my assistant, Lt. Joanna McCoy. This is the one and only Captain James T. Kirk. And watch it, Jo - he's a ladies' man."

While Kay was talking I cleared away Jim's papers and watched him like an eagle. His eyes never left my daughter's.

"So you are Bones' daughter." Jim took hold on Jo's hand and held it for a lot longer than he needed to. "Bones, you never told me she was so lovely."

The warning bells were starting to ring in my head. "You never asked," I retorted.

"Len here tells me someone tried to kill you twice, once with the vaccine and again when he got hit over the head. Any idea who, Jim?"

"Nope," Jim replied flatly.

"New personnel?" Joanna asked. Now why hadn't I thought of that possibility?

"We did pick up a new batch of personnel at our last stopover," I reported. "I only just finished their medicals the other day."

"Any possibility there, Len?" Kay Ross asked.

"No, there was nothing out of the ordinary in them. Spock, could you do a cross match?" I suggested.

"Already done. There is nothing to report."

"Right, Jim, you know why I'm here, don't you?"

"Sort of," came Jim's wary reply.

"Well, Len here informed me that there was an outbreak of 'flu,

so when he told me that both you and Spock here were down with it, plus 40-odd crew, I decided to investigate the source and put the ship under the yellow flag. However, when the source is isolated I would normally not bother, but when Len called in this morning with the news that you were down with Vegan Choriomeningitis, I decided I'd better come aboard in case the rest were down with the same. You understand, Jim, I need to run some tests on you myself to satisfy HQ."

"What tests?" Jim asked.

"Just the usual, blood, tissue and a full Sigmund. In fact, Len could as easily do them, but that would mean you spending some time in the base hospital having me repeat them; this way you stay on the Enterprise. Follow me?"

"Yes."

"You know the virus can cause some types of personality changes, and more so in a second attack such as yours," Admiral Ross said bluntly. "And if I witness any more of that kind of behaviour with the nurses, Jim, I will have no option but to certify you medically unfit for duty, command, and service in Starfleet. You will be discharged as being mentally unfit. The ball's in your court, Jim. The nurses have a bad enough job without you making it worse. Understand?"

"Perfectly."

Jim had just had his fingers well and truly rapped, and I have never seen such a transformation in him as I was seeing now. I thought I'd better remember the Admiral's tactics for the future. I knew also that Jim was okay as I had run tests on him earlier; I was confident that Kay would find the same.

Joanna had grown into a lovely young woman. Her hair was like her mother's, a rich chestnut. Her mother's had been like that when I had first met her all those years ago. I only hoped she was more like me in personality than her hot-headed mother, as she was a carbon copy of her mother looking at me.

"Lost your tongue, Jim?" Kay asked.

Jim had gone very quiet, digesting what she had just said to him.

"No, just digesting your last statement. You wouldn't, would you?"

"Try me and see, Jim. Now I suggest you get some rest before the tests. Joanna, I want you to stay with the Captain. You know the drill." Then she turned to me. "Now perhaps we can continue this conversation in your office, Doctor."

"Yes, Admiral," came my daughter's reply.

Now why was my sixth sense ringing? It wasn't that I didn't trust Jim. I did... but not where my daughter was concerned.

Once inside the duty office Kay turned to me. "I hope you don't mind me being so hard on Jim, but it's the only way to deal with him after such an attack. Remember, it was on the Hood that he had his first attack, and I have previous experience," Kay smiled.

"Rather you than me."

"Yes, well he doesn't seem too bad for his experience. Are these the test results?" She had lifted my work board from the desk and had started to read my notes.

"Yes."

"Len, you seem preoccupied."

"Worried, more like it. Who'd want to kill Jim?" I asked out loud, "And for what reason?"

"Revenge is the usual motive."

"Maybe, but for what?"

"Well, let's see if we can find out by going through the file."

"You honestly think it's one of the crew?"

"It has to be someone," Kay exclaimed.

As I bent over the medical computer to extract a disc I winced in pain. It didn't go unnoticed.

"Len, have you hurt your back, or is it just old age creeping in?" Kay asked as she probed the area gently. After she had finished her examination she smiled. "You'll live. It's just a pulled muscle. How on earth did you manage to do it?"

"Earth has nothing to do with it, and it's a long story which we don't have time to go into just now." There was no point in telling her about that little episode this morning.

I keyed in my clearance number to the medical computer and punched in the information I required.

"Working," the metallic voice sounded.

"List all male crew members in alphabetical order starting with the last crew replacements."

It took a few minutes for the computer to print out all the names. I decided that there was no point in checking past the third-last intake, and Kay agreed.

"It may be a good idea to get Personnel to send up their files to compare with these medical ones," Kay suggested.

"Spock's already checked the last lot we picked up," I remembered, "so if we start with these and cross check them we might get lucky."

At that moment the door opened and the Personnel Officer came in. "Sorry to bother you, Dr. McCoy, Admiral, but I thought you should have a look at these files," he said as he dropped two computer discs onto my desk.

"What's this?" Kay asked.

"Two people who could have had something to do with the attempt on the Captain's life," he informed us.

"Have you informed Mr. Spock?" I asked.

"Yes, sir. He said to give them to you for a medical cross match."

"I see. Right, you'd better give them here."

"Yes, sir. There they are on the desk."

"Right, thank you, Lieutenant." With that I dismissed him and fed the first disc into the computer.

"I could do with a coffee, Len. How about you?" Kay said as she popped the other disc into the spare viewer.

"Okay, I'll see to it." With that I left the office to look for a nurse.

As I passed the side ward the door was open and I could hear Joanna laughing as Chris came out.

"What's going on in there?" I asked her.

"The Captain and the Lieutenant were laughing about your escapade this morning," I was informed with a smile.

"Well, it's nothing to grin about, and could you ask them to keep it down."

I made a mental note to talk to my daughter about Jim Kirk and the number of women's hearts he had broken - and the sooner the better.

By the time I got back to the Admiral she had gone through the two computer discs with a fine tooth comb. Thanks to an emergency I had been held up, so giving her the chance to get on, and she had asked Spock to come down.

"... so I suggest we place these two in the brig as a precaution," she was saying to him as I entered.

"May I point out that there is no proof that either of them are involved," Spock answered.

"Yes, I know, but one had a father who served with the Captain and who was killed while on landing party duty under Jim's command. Yes, I remember Armstrong very well. That was when Jim was on the Hood. And the other... His sister was killed not long after Jim took command of the Enterprise, so both have a motive," Kay finished her argument.

"Motive, yes, but did they do it?" I questioned, adding, "It might help eliminate them from the investigation if they were in the brig. If they are not involved then the one who is is bound to strike again. My guess is whoever it is is under a lot of pressure, and is near breaking point."

"Yes, I tend to agree, Len," Kay replied, and we both looked at Spock.

"The brig is not big enough to house the whole crew," Spock replied.

A joke? I wondered.

"Is that meant to be a joke, Spock? If so it's not funny," I said, a little unsure how to take the double implication of the last statement.

"I do not joke. I merely stated the facts as I see them. The brig is not large enough to house the entire crew," came the typical Spockian reply.

"As yet we are only clutching at straws," I responded as Kay watched the by-play with a smile on her face.

"Doctor, I do not see what straws have to do with it. They are merely instruments for sucking fluid up into one's mouth," Spock replied.

"Don't start, Spock," I retorted as I noticed the Admiral's face. Then I had the perfect reply. "After all, it is the most logical suggestion so far, to eliminate them from the investigation by securing them in a place they cannot get out of. It's fool-proof." This made me feel better. One up to me, I think.

"You both have valid points. I feel if they are innocent they will be only too happy to place themselves in the hands of Security, which will eliminate them from the enquiries." Kay spoke with authority, and no-one questioned her after that.

"I will talk with them," Spock informed her politely, "and if they agree to co-operate then so be it. But I will not order them to co-operate - they must do it of their own accord."

"Spock's right, Kay." I had to agree on that point at least.

"Your Security department are all trustworthy?"

I had been waiting for the question.

"Yes, Admiral. All our Security men and women have at one time or another risked their lives for the Captain."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, Admiral, I am," Spock reported, and stood up. "If you will excuse me, I have a lot of work to do."

Once Spock had gone I took the opportunity to explain about our Security Department. "Kay."

"Yes, Len?"

"Our Security are the best in the fleet. It's like a brotherhood. They all swear allegiance to Starfleet, but they also swear to protect the Captain with their lives, and that's a personal oath between them and their commander."

I tried to explain as best I could without going too deep, or the Security Chief would have my hide if he ever found out, but she had to be told. Nor did I like the way Kay was treating Spock, and I told her,

"Kay, look, Spock's Jim's best friend and mine. He'd give his life for us - and for that matter, for you too."

"Doctor, are you trying to tell me something?"

"God damn it, yes! Kay, Spock does have feelings, so treat him like any human being."

"Are you trying to tell me a Vulcan has feelings?"

"That I am," I responded.

"Very well, I stand corrected. I've never worked with a Vulcan who had any emotions."

"Well, Spock's different," I replied, glad that was out of the way at last. I hate the way people tend to dismiss Vulcans without a by-your-leave.

"He's a hybrid, isn't he, Len? Human/Vulcan?"

"That's right, and he's often risked his life for Jim and myself."

"Are you quite finished?"

"Yes, quite."

"Right, then, let's get on - or better still, off you go and have lunch. Your head nurse can help me with Jim's tests, okay?"

"You're on. You know, I can't remember when I last had a meal," I replied as we left the workroom and entered the duty office, where I lifted a small bottle of uppers. I was determined to stay on my feet until this was over.

"What are those, Len?" Kay asked. "I hope they're not what I think they are."

Oh shit! I thought. *Trust me - now I'm in for another lecture.* "They are," I said. There was no point in hiding the fact.

"How many have you taken so far?"

"Two."

"Well, another two can't hurt you, but remember, pills are no substitute for sleep - and don't let me see you take them."

I was surprised she hadn't pulled me over the coals about using them. "What, no lecture?"

"I know you, Len, remember, very well indeed, and I know you don't make a habit of using things like that. I'll go so far as to say you loathe pills, but I also know you won't rest until this is over."

"You're right, Kay," I responded as she took a step towards me.

Her hand covered mine, and she looked into my eyes, the look that years ago I never could resist. At one time I would have scooped her up in my arms, but that was then and this was now; but the old magic was still there as I fought down the urge to sweep her off her feet.

"Not now, Kay. It's not the time nor the place," I said, my

voice husky.

"Yes, you're right."

We made our way down the corridor in silence. When we entered the side ward my daughter was perched on the side of Jim's bed. This I totally disapproved of. I looked at the diagnostic panel above his head, and was glad to see that the readings were back to normal.

"Well, Jim, if you're good I'll let you up for a little while this evening, and if you feel all right I'll return you to light duty the day after tomorrow," I said dryly - too dryly, for Jim just looked at me with a puzzled look on his face.

"Right, off you go, Joanna, and have lunch with your father. I'll get Nurse Chapel to help me with the tests," Kay said. I guess she too had felt the atmosphere thicken.

Jo was silent as we walked down the corridor to the officers' mess and collected some lunch. Once we were sitting at a table she spoke.

"What's up with you? I thought Jim was your friend, but you're acting like a bear with a sore head."

"So it's Jim now, is it?"

"He said that Captain Kirk was too formal, with me being your daughter, and he asked me to call him Jim. What's wrong with that? He's nice, and I like him. In fact, he's more charming than you led me to believe in your stargrams. He's super company, and you've told me so much that I was able to discuss things that have happened in the past with him," Jo said.

"Look, Jim's a smooth talker, and he usually gets what he wants," I said with a mouthful of chicken.

"Dad, are you suggesting what I think you are? If so you're way out of line. Jim's nice, but he could be my older brother, so don't start, Dad," Jo said as she sipped her coffee.

"Look, love, I know how many female friends Jim has had, and usually they end up either dead or deeply hurt."

"And you don't want me being one of them, right?"

"Right."

"I've listened to you, now you can listen to me. You were never around when I was a kid, always out on a call or something; now you're coming on like an over-protective father. It's too late for that, Dad. You were never there when I did need you; now I'm old enough to take care of myself and pick my own friends. I'm a big girl now, and I can manage to look after myself - I've been doing it since you and Mum split up. If and when I need your advice I'll ask for it; until then please don't interfere."

"Be careful Jo - that's all I ask."

"Dad, I'm always careful. Friends?"

"Friends, sweetheart. Only remember what I said - I don't want to have to mop up any tears."

"I will, so don't worry, I'm not about to get involved with anyone; but there *is* such a thing as a platonic friendship."

"I know, but somehow Jim's always turn out to be the other sort," I replied, sipping my coffee.

"Don't worry, I'm not about to get romantically involved. I'm a career woman at the moment, and intend to be so for the next ten years or so yet, so don't build up any hopes for grandchildren. You and Mum put me off marriage good and proper. I'd rather just live with a bloke and be able to walk out without all the nasty business of divorce. So that's me," Jo said with a smile.

I wasn't reassured as we went back to sickbay.

Once there I confirmed with Spock that the two men had agreed to spend some time in the brig to eliminate themselves from the enquiries, claiming that they had nothing to hide. I believed them, for Spock mentioned that he had told them that their records showed a positive motive, and they had agreed that it was a logical solution. However, I wasn't feeling too pleased, because it also meant that if the assailant was neither of the two then he could strike again, and Jim was still in danger.

I went into the side ward and found Jim alone. "How did it go?" I asked.

"She won't tell me," Jim complained. "Where's Jo? I could do with some cheerful company and some intelligent conversation. No offence, Bones, but Jo's... different."

"And she's only 21. I don't want her added to your list of conquests," I said bluntly.

"So that's what's bothering you," Jim said in disbelief.

"It's out now - now you know."

"Look, Bones, she's nice, and yes, I like her, but she's your daughter and that that; in fact, you could say she's like a niece to me. I feel I've known her all my life. And as I said, she *is* your daughter."

"Well, just you remember that, and don't go adding her to your list of conquests."

"Don't worry, I won't. I'm not about to hurt her. Anyway, you should know I'm married to my ship - that way I avoid getting hurt myself. I'm getting too old for romance; it's safer just having good true friends I can trust and rely on."

"Jim, are you all right?" I asked, not liking this line of talk.

"Yes. You could say I've had time to assess my life style, and I've come to the conclusion that I'm meant to remain a bachelor, as every time I do get involved, someone gets hurt. I don't think I could go through that again. Anyway, as this Vegan Choriomeningitis is passed down from father to son there is no point in inflicting that on any child I may have. So, Bones, you could say I've grown up at last. I won't say there won't be any females who'll attract my attention sexually, but your daughter is not one of them, okay?"

"Okay. Now I'd better go and see what Kay's up to," I said.

I found Kay in the biochemical lab, totally engrossed in comparing my slides with hers.

"So what did you find?" I asked as she took the last slide out of the microscope.

"Len, don't creep upon people like that - you made me jump out of my skin," she snapped. "You almost made me drop this, and I don't think Jim would thank me if I had to take more blood from him. He was full of moans and groans."

"Sorry," I said again, feeling really chastised.

"Jim's fine. He's been lucky - that last blood test showed the virus to be inactive."

"Until it strikes again," I said, not liking the implications.

"Jim's not going to like what I'm going to suggest, Len, but I think monthly blood checks from now on should give a good indication if the virus is becoming active. There's been a lot of research into this condition, and so far we know that the structure of the virus changes slowly as it becomes active. That process takes about a month under normal conditions, and under a week if it's induced, as Jim's was this time."

"No, he's not going to like it one bit," I had to agree; I knew Jim too well.

"There is an experimental drug being tested that we hope will kill the virus once and for all, so that people like Jim can live their lives without fear of the virus becoming active again, but it can only be given when the virus is actually active. As I said, Len, it's only experimental, and so far there are a lot of side effects," Kay informed me.

"Has it been passed for use yet?" I enquired.

"No, but as soon as it is you'll get a supply to have on hand just in case."

"Right, so who's going to tell Jim that he's fine?" I asked.

"I am, and it will give me a good deal of pleasure."

"Just tell him straight, with no messing about," I said; I knew her too well.

"Who, me?" she asked innocently.

"Yes, you. I know you, remember," I said.

"Yes, I know. How could I forget? Those times were good," Kay said.

"Yes they were, but rank got in the way," I reminded her.

There was this little Starfleet rule that said the rank above and the rank below were permitted. At that time I had been a Lieutenant, and Kay a Lieutenant-Commander, but now she was an Admiral and I was a Lieutenant-Commander, which was four or five ranks below her. That put any idea of picking up the pieces out of my head, as it would be me that Starfleet would come down on like a

ton of bricks.

"Yes, it did, Len, but it might not have if you had taken up my offer of becoming my assistant." Then Kay asked the question I had been waiting for. "Len, why didn't you?" Her voice was thick with emotion.

"One reason, Kay. I joined Starfleet for space duty, and not to be stuck behind a desk pen-pushing, or advising the top brass on Earth," I said flatly. It was a lame reason.

"You said exactly that then when I asked you to join my staff, but it was deeper than that." Kay wasn't going to let up until she had the full story, and that was why I had been trying for the last four years of my life to avoid coming face to face with her.

"My reasons are still the same, Kay. I'd only just joined the Enterprise, and I didn't fancy another move at that time," I informed her.

"I'm more inclined to think you have a lot more loyalty to a certain Captain who will remain nameless."

"Yes, well, you may just have hit the nail on the head," I said, letting the subject drop, but between you and me I had a more important job looking after Jim and Spock than I would have done sitting pen-pushing to an advisory committee with the glory of rank.

"Well then, let's go and see Jim." Kay's voice broke into my thoughts.

"Fine," I replied, and headed for the side ward. If I knew Jim he would be demanding to get up and back on duty even though I'd told him earlier he couldn't. I wasn't wrong.

"So if I'm all right when can I get up?" he asked as soon as he had been told.

"I told you earlier, and I'm not going back on it," I said.

"Bones?" he pleaded.

"No. You're lucky to be alive, and there's no use rushing things." I knew I wasn't popular.

"Bones..."

"NO -and that's final."

"Bones?" Kay questioned.

Trust Jim, I thought. "Just his nickname for me," I explained.

"I see." Kay was smiling and loving every minute of this.

"So I'm stuck in here then, am I?" Jim said.

"Yes, so you can like it or lump it."

"Yes you will, young man, and if you don't stop mumping and moaning I'll have you transferred to the base hospital, understood?" Kay threatened.

"Understood," Jim said meekly.

That evening I helped Jim into a chair. He was pretty stiff, but that wasn't surprising after all he had been through in the last few days.

So that was that. All was quiet, and Kay had transported down to the Starbase to make her report to Starfleet Command.

The night passed with no other attempt on Jim's life, and the next morning I discharged him to his quarters; there wasn't much else I could do apart from tying him to his bed in sickbay, which wasn't on. The Security Chief had placed a guard on his door. I honestly don't think Jim was too pleased to see the redshirt standing guard, but as the class one search had turned nothing up the Chief was taking no chances.

The quarantine was now unnecessary, but the good Admiral had not ordered its removal, thus giving us a chance to clear up this mess without the intervention of Special Security Section, which wouldn't look too good on the ship's record.

My thoughts were interrupted by the intercom bleeping in my ear.

"McCoy!" I barked. I'd just finished discharging the rest of the 'flu victims, and was in middle of the darn paperwork when the thing had gone off.

"Bones, can you please bring up something for a headache when you've got a minute?" It was Jim's voice.

"Sure. I'll be through here in about ten minutes, okay?"

"Fine. How about some lunch?"

"Okay - I can spare an hour."

"See you in ten minutes."

Before I left sickbay I informed Chris Chapel where she could find me if I was needed and headed down the corridor to the turbolift, pill bottle in hand. I was soon on Deck 5. Jim's persistent headache bothered me, and I decided to be on the safe side and check into the after effects of the drug I had used on him as soon as I returned to sickbay.

As I stopped outside Jim's door the security guard nodded, and I pressed the call panel on the door. "Anything happening, Lieutenant?" I asked.

"No, sir. All quiet."

"If that's you, Bones, you know you don't have to knock. Come on in."

Jim's voice came out of the wall intercom. The door opened and I entered. Joanna was sitting in one of the chairs in the living area of the room, and Spock in the other. Jim sat on the corner of his desk, perched like a bird.

"Got those pills on you, Bones?" he asked, so I knew his head

must be bad.

I tossed the bottle to him, half expecting him to drop it, but he didn't. "Take two every four hours, but no more - and better still, get some rest, understand?"

"Yes, perfectly," Jim replied as he swallowed the two pills.

"Right, now do you mind telling me what's going on?" I asked.

"Nope, not at all. I want a full report on what the hell has been going on on my ship, because I don't remember very much about the last few days. I want to be filled in."

At that moment Joanna vacated the chair she was sitting in and making her excuses she began to leave the room. Jim tried to stop her.

"Do you have to go?" he asked.

"Yes, Jim, I do. I've been sitting around here long enough this morning, and I have work to do before Admiral Ross returns."

Joanna smiled a smile that was reserved for Jim and Jim alone, and I drew my brows down in disapproval.

"Well, don't forget the road back, now," Jim was saying, "and once your old man gives me the all-clear I'll show you around the ship."

"I won't. Now I really must go and complete that report for Kay." With that she left, and Jim managed to bring his mind back to the present.

"That's some daughter you've got, Bones," he commented.

"Well, just you remember that she *is* my daughter," I snapped.

"Bones, as I said before, she's your daughter, and that's that," Jim retorted, holding my stare. If looks could kill...

"Captain, hadn't you better put the pills the doctor has just given you into the bathroom cabinet for safe keeping," Spock said, trying to defuse the situation.

"Yes, you're right, Spock. I won't be a minute."

The next lot of events happened so fast that I'm not exactly sure what happened. I vaguely remember Jim closing the bathroom door, then as I turned to say something to Spock, who was helping himself to some lunch from the table where the steward had left the trays, there was a loud bang and a bright blue flash. Spock had been totally unprepared for what happened. I was sitting on the floor with broken furniture all around me, and I was aware of Spock landing heavily against the bulkhead wall.

The force of the blast had come from the centre of the room. As I picked myself up from the floor I winced in pain and fought down a dreadful feeling of nausea.

"Spock! Oh my god!" I yelled as Jim came rushing through from the bathroom.

"Bones, don't just stand there!" Jim snapped at me as the room filled with security personnel.

I struggled across the room to Spock's side, and felt for a pulse. It was weak but steady. A medi trolley appeared at my side, and I stood up to let Dr. M'Benga take over, then I promptly passed out.

I woke to find myself in sickbay with Joanna sitting by my side holding my hand.

"Spock?" I said as I tried to sit up.

Joanna's hand pushed me down on the bed. "Lie still, Dad," she ordered.

Carefully I turned to look at the man in the next bed. Jim sat silent, keeping a still hand over Spock's, waiting for the right moment when his help would be required to bring Spock round.

"I see you're awake, then," Kay Ross's voice echoed around in my head. "How do you feel?"

"Spock?" I asked again, before answering her question regarding myself.

"Will be all right. He's in a healing trance," Jo answered.

"I asked how you felt," Kay repeated.

"Rotten," I replied. I was in no mood for anything, and my head didn't half hurt. "Jim?" I asked, as I couldn't remember if he had been hurt.

"I'm here, Bones, and I'm fine - just a bit shaken, that's all," he told me as he dragged his eyes from Spock.

"Why is no-one telling me what's up with Spock?" I demanded to know.

"Spock has flash burns and a bad concussion," Kay reported. She knew I'd never give it a rest until I found out what was what.

"And?" I had this strange feeling she was keeping something back from me.

"What?" She was trying to play down the situation.

"He's blind, Bones. God, he's going to be blind!" Jim responded with anguish in his voice.

"Oh lord... Permanent?" I questioned.

"I don't know," Kay replied. She sounded devastated, and I didn't bother to ask when she had returned aboard. She was here. Once again I tried to sit up.

"Len, you're in no fit state to get up. You've had another nasty bang on the head," Kay protested.

"Where's M'Benga?" I demanded as I stood up, gripping the side

of the bed for support as I became very dizzy. "Just let me get on my feet... and where the hell is M'Benga?" I repeated.

"There was another explosion, and he's in the operating room," Kay informed me as she pressed a hypo to my upper arm.

"What's that?" I demanded; I hate being pumped full of stuff without knowing what it is.

"You wanted to be on your feet."

"What have you just pumped into me?"

"Venceen," she informed me.

"Dad?" Joanna's voice cut in.

"What?"

"Stop being impossible. You're like a bear with a sore head." She sounded just like Jim when he starts.

"That's probably because I have a sore head," I retorted as I reached for an ophthalmoscope from the instrument cabinet. "All right, give me room!" I barked as I crossed to Spock's side.

"What are you going to do?" Kay asked as she moved aside.

"Examine his eyes - what does it look like?" I wasn't in the best of moods.

"Don't you trust me?" Kay asked.

"Frankly, and in one word - NO!"

Well, that was it; it was out now. I removed the dressings covering Spock's eyes, and gently lifted the burned eyelids.

After I had finished my examination I straightened up and turned to face them. "If it's the same as last time, Spock's eyes will be all right," I said at last.

"Are you sure?" Jim asked.

"As sure as I can be at this stage. It looks like the second eyelid has closed down over the iris, giving the effect of a total shutdown," I explained.

"The what?" Kay questioned; I knew she had had very few dealings with Vulcans.

"The second eyelid."

"Are you having me on... Bones?"

"Nope," I smiled.

"You'd better explain, Bones," Jim said; it was more of an order than a request.

"Yes, well, the Vulcans have an eye defence system that shuts down if it is subjected to, say, an explosion of too much light."

"Well, you learn something new every day," Kay replied. "Now how about going back to bed?"

"Look, Kay, I'm fine," I protested.

"No matter what I say, as soon as my back's turned you'll be up, right?"

"That's right. Honest, I'm fine - even my headache has gone now."

"Very well, Doctor," Kay said reluctantly. "Only any more dizzy turns, and you're bedded down, understood?"

"Perfectly," I said, as innocently as possible.

"Right, Joanna, let's leave your father to get dressed in peace."

"You're up to something, Bones," Jim said as soon as the door had closed.

"Who, me?" I said innocently as I pulled on my trousers.

"Yes, you, Mister. Don't think you can pull the wool over my eyes. You can't - remember, I know you too well. So what's going on?"

"It's a hunch, Jim. Let's leave it at that until I've had a chance to talk with the Security Chief, okay?"

"You think you know who's behind this little lot, don't you?" Jim stated as he caught my upper arm, making me look him in the eyes.

"I don't want to say anything until I've spoken to Security," I told him.

"Bones..."

"Jim, please let go." I didn't add that he was hurting me as he tightened his grip.

"Sorry, Bones," he said as he realised.

"Look, I'll be all right. You stay here until Spock comes round. He'll need you."

"Bones?"

"I'll be all right, okay?"

"It'll just have to be, won't it?" Jim replied as he realised I wasn't going to say anything.

"That's right," I smiled, hauling on my uniform top. Once I'd put my boots on I headed for the door.

"Bones," Jim called after me.

"What?"

"Be careful."

"I'm always careful - that just happens to be my middle name," I said, trying to make light of the situation and hide how dreadful I was actually feeling.

I made my way down to the security office next to the brig, and found the Security Chief sitting behind his desk writing a report. It was then that I realised I must have been out cold for a good long while.

"Doctor McCoy." The Chief stood up and came to my side. "Here, sit down, sir - that was some blast you were caught in," he said as he led me to a seat.

"That's what I've come to see you about," I replied as I sat down gratefully.

"I don't know how the explosion could have got past me, sir."

"Well, we know now it's neither of the two in the brig."

"Yes, we do."

"Who all went in to see the Captain?" I asked.

"Apart from yourself, Mr. Spock and Lieutenant McCoy, there was only the Chief Steward and the Personnel Officer," he informed me.

"So there were only the two. What did the P.O. want?"

"He had some files for the Captain."

"I see."

"I checked both IDs, and what they were carrying, and they were clean."

"Did you check them?" I questioned.

"You mean a body check?"

"Yes."

"No, sir, I didn't."

"Thank you, that's all I wanted to know." I stood up very carefully, as my head was pounding once again.

"You're on to something." It was not a question, but a statement.

"That remains to be seen, but let's say I'm playing a good old-fashioned hunch, and I'll let you know as soon as I've had a chance to have a word with the Captain."

"You all right, sir?"

"Just a little dizzy," I replied. "Any idea what contained the explosives?"

"My boys are still working on that."

"Thanks. I'll get back to you some time today."

With that I left the security office and headed back to sickbay. I found Jim sitting on the edge of Spock's bed. Spock was awake, and looking a little more like himself.

"Well, what did Security have to say on the matter?" Jim demanded to know.

"Confirmed what I suspected," was all I got a chance to say before Jim took hold of my arm and led me round to the bed.

"You look hellish," he commented.

I didn't need to be told how I looked - I knew how I felt.

"Bones, are you all right?" Jim asked as I sank down onto the bed.

"I will be," I replied.

"Are you sure?" he questioned as I stood up again, only this time I really felt dizzy, and sat down.

"No, you're not all right, are you?" Jim observed. "Come on, lie down, will you, before you fall off the edge of that bed." He swung my legs up into the bed, taking my boots off at the same time.

"You had two visitors to your quarters, apart from us lot. Did you leave either of them alone?"

"Two?" Jim questioned.

"Yes, the Chief Steward and the Personnel Officer."

"No. I went into my sleeping area for a file for Ian, but I was no sooner gone than I was back again. You don't think... No. That bang on the head must have scrambled your brains." Jim would not admit that the possibility was a real one. "I've known Ian Morris since the Academy - in fact, I went out with his sister for a while before I was deep space posted. I don't believe Ian is capable of doing such a thing, and for what motive?"

I could see that Jim was none too pleased with my suggestion, but it had to be said.

"That remains to be seen," I replied, feeling better now that the dizziness had gone.

"You okay?" Jim questioned as I stood up.

"I will be, once your life is no longer in danger," I replied as I slipped on my boots.

"Where are you going now?"

"I've got a few medical files I want to check up on, so I'll be in the medical computer room if I'm needed. You stay here and keep Spock company. Incidentally, Spock, how do you feel?"

"Doctor, I would feel a lot more myself if I could get some peace and quiet from all this non-productive chit-chat."

"You're on the mend," I replied, not up to my usual sarky remarks.

"Just be careful, Bones," Jim said.

"I always am," I replied as I escaped in search of Joanna.

I found Jo and Kay Ross at the computer.

"Here, sit down, you look terrible," Jo said as she forced me to sit down.

"I'll live," I answered. "You doing a cross match, by any chance?"

"Yes. We started at the A's and now we're onto the F's. The Science Officer tied in the two computers. There has to be someone somewhere - it's just finding the lead," Kay informed me.

"I know, and I think I know who it is," I said triumphantly.

"Dad, who?" Jo asked.

"Ian Morris, the Personnel Officer. Jim went to the Academy with him, and used to date his sister." I emphasised the last bit more than I needed to.

"What possible motive could he have?" Kay questioned.

"What did Jim say, Dad?" asked Jo. "I take it you have told him?"

"Yes, and he won't believe me," I informed them.

"Neither would I if you came to me with a cock and bull story after a bang on the head like the last one you got," Kay responded. I pointedly ignored the statement and turned to my daughter.

"Joanna, would you please get me the appropriate computer disc."

It took her a few moments to find the disc and set up the computer with the relevant programme. The computer took the disc code, and began to sort through the memory banks, revealing Ian Morris's name, age, serial number, and a brief background on his family history.

"Focus in on his family background," I ordered the computer.

"You looking for something in particular?" Kay asked.

"That's something I won't know until I find it," I smiled as the computer bleeped and the information came up on the screen.

"It says... Oh my god, Len, look!" Kay was staring at the screen in total disbelief.

"Still don't believe me, Kay? So his sister killed herself after giving birth to a stillborn child the same year Jim was deep space posted. Well, well, well."

"Now we only have to convince Jim of the facts and catch Morris in the act," Kay commented.

"That's not going to be easy," I replied.

"Which one? Jim, or catching him in the act?" Jo asked.

"Both," I smiled. "Let me and Spock tackle Jim. If I can convince Spock, then he's the one who can convince Jim."

With that under my cap, so to speak, I made my way to where Jim was with Spock. To my surprise Spock was discussing the possibility of Ian Morris being the suspect.

"No, Spock, there's no way it's possible that he could be the culprit. I know him too well."

"That's just it, Jim - how well do you know him?" I asked as I caught hold of the bottom of the bed for support.

"Doctor McCoy, perhaps you would enlighten us as to how much you have uncovered."

"Well, you're not going to like it, Jim. Ian Morris's sister killed herself after giving birth to a stillborn child," I reported.

"When?" Jim demanded to know; he had visibly paled.

"5603.10," I gave the date. "Exactly six months after you finished at the Academy." I let the last statement sink in before adding, "So how long did you date her?"

"Six months or so," he replied as realisation sank in. "Bones, you don't think that I'm responsible for the child, do you?"

"It is a logical assumption to make, Jim," Spock responded.

"Oh boy!" Jim said as he sank down onto the bed.

"It is only circumstantial," I told him.

"But it all points to one thing," Jim replied.

"Yes, it does, and I'm going to have to sit down before I fall down," I said.

Before I knew what was happening Jim was leading me round to the chair at the bedside. "Bones, you're in no fit state to be galloping around."

I didn't feel like protesting, as I felt hellish. Before I could say anything Jim had hit the intercom button and had called Kay; before you could say Jack Robinson I was back in bed with Kay running the scanner over me.

"You'll live, Len," she informed me as she read the scanner, then she turned to Jim with a look of pure devilment on her face.

"I'm all right," Jim protested.

"Jim, do as you're told," I started. "You can't go back to your quarters, can you?"

"No, but I can go and see Ian, can't I?"

"Why not leave it till the morning?" Kay suggested.

"No, I'd rather see him now," Jim replied as he moved to the

door.

I knew instantly what Kay was up to with the hypo in her hand. She quickly plunged it home against Jim's arm, and a look of disbelief was magically written all over his face as he realised what had happened. Kay and Joanna each took one of his arms, and led him to the third bed in the ward.

"You really should learn to do as you are told, Jim. I did say, after all, leave it until tomorrow. Now you'll have to." With very little effort they settled him on the bed, then Kay turned to Spock and myself.

"If you try the same stunt you'll get the same dose as Jim, understand, Leonard?"

"Perfectly."

"Spock?"

"You seem to have made yourself quite clear," Spock replied.

Kay turned to look at me.

"I'm not going anywhere, so don't worry, Kay." *This'll teach me to mess around with uppers, I thought.* I felt like hell, and knew they had finally caught up with me. One could so easily get hooked on them just to avoid this horrible feeling. I wanted two more to get rid of it, but if I did then I would want two more and two more, so I knew it was time to sleep.

"Well, Len, drugs are no substitute for sleep, now are they?" Kay smiled, and I realised she knew I had taken more than I had let on.

"You're right, as usual," I replied as I felt my eyelids closing.

When yours truly finally woke up there was no sign of Jim anywhere. Spock was asleep or meditating - I couldn't really tell which, though the overhead panel was showing a slightly uneasy sleep reading. Making as little noise as possible I tested my legs, and found to my satisfaction that everything was in full working order. I just about jumped out of my skin when Christine Chapel's voice broke into my thoughts.

"Really, you of all people should know better." She had taken hold of my arm, and was trying to propel me back to bed.

"I'm fine," I protested.

"How about letting me be the judge?" M'Benga said as he appeared in the doorway.

Fifteen minutes later I was in my own quarters feeling pleased with myself. M'Benga had let me off the hook as long as I took things easy; but that was something I had no intention of doing as Spock lay in sickbay and Jim was on the loose with a maniac on board who just happened to be trying to kill him. When I had washed and changed I headed for the bridge, where I knew I'd find Jim in the centre of things.

"I see they let you out, too," Jim smiled as I came to a stop at his side.

"Yep."

"How's Spock?"

"He was asleep when I left him."

"He's still asleep," Jim mumbled as he signed yet another batch of forms.

"Jim, I said light duties," I said quietly.

"Yes, but that was before Spock got hurt."

"That's not the point," I started to protest.

"Don't worry, I'll take things easy. It's not as if we're galloping around the cosmos at the moment."

"No, but still..."

"Look, what can happen while we're flying the yellow flag? No, don't answer. A lot, I know."

That did it. I exploded. "What can happen? I'll tell you what can happen. Someone's trying to kill you, Spock's lying in sickbay, I've been hit on the head and had more excitement in the last three days than I've had in my entire space career, and you ask what can happen!"

"Bones, don't exaggerate," Jim replied as I realised that all the bridge crew were intent on our conversation.

"Don't exaggerate? Don't exaggerate?" I repeated as I threw my arms up in the air. "What's the use? I suppose if anything else happens I'll be expected to pull off another medical miracle." I was looking him right in the eye.

"Yes, that's right, Bones. After all, that's what you get paid for."

"And what if I can't?" I asked bluntly.

"That's a chance I'll just have to take."

"What's the use?" I said again. I was getting nowhere. Time for a subtle change of subject.

"How about some lunch?" I asked; after all, it was 12.00 hours, and his break time.

"That sounds like a good idea, only no more lectures, please, Bones."

"It's a deal," I agreed as Jim handed over the con to his relief.

Once in the mess we chose a quiet corner to seat ourselves in, and believe me, it was hard not to lecture Jim on his lunch - a hamburger sandwich. I had this gut feeling that he was trying to provoke me, but I had given him my word, and I wasn't about to go

back on it.

"So tell me, what sort of relationship did you have with Morris's sister?" I asked as I sipped my coffee.

"Up and down. Why?" Jim asked, his mouth full of hamburger.

"Just trying to get a clearer picture, Jim, that's all."

"Her name was Jenna. Ian introduced us at a party, and it took off from there."

"Jim, I'm going to ask a few personal questions," I said, keeping my voice low.

"I'll answer one question right now, Bones. I can't remember if we ever made love."

"What was she like?"

"Honestly, it was 15 years ago, and I just can't remember, Bones... She was good company, especially at a party."

"So she was the life and soul of the party," I commented, watching Jim's face.

"Yes."

"And she meant nothing to you."

"Yes and no," Jim answered.

"Is it yes or no?"

"I cared for her, Bones, but she didn't mean that much. It was a casual relationship, more open than anything." Jim sipped his coffee.

"A relationship with no strings?"

"Yes, exactly, only..." Jim hesitated.

"What?"

"I found her in bed with my room-mate. I remember it all quite clearly now, Bones."

"Well, it helps to talk it over with a friend. So what happened?"

"There was no way it could have been my child, Bones. I never touched her - she wouldn't let me. Yet it was common knowledge she'd been sleeping around, so when I found her in bed with my room-mate I kicked her out. There was no way I was standing for that. I ended up having a fight with Ian over it. We were hauled in front of the Academy Principal and pointedly told to keep our personal lives separate from our service. I was posted soon after."

"What else is going to crop up from your past?"

"Nothing, I hope. Want another cup of coffee?"

"Why not."

It was then that I noticed Ian Morris settling himself down just two tables away. A second or two later Jim returned.

"Jim," I said casually, taking the cup from him.

"What?"

"I was wondering if you could spare an hour for a workout and swim this evening," I said loudly, feeling like a prize fool.

"You feeling all right? I mean, has that bump on the head scrambled your brains or something?" Jim asked sarcastically.

"I feel perfectly all right. Why?"

"You, work out, Bones? That's a joke in itself."

"Let's put it this way. After what's been going on it's about time I sharpened up my act, and I just thought you might be better than the P.T. instructor. At least you won't take me apart and then put me back together again."

Jim smiled at that, and I realised what was on his mind.

"You won't, will you?"

"Don't be too sure. Say 19.00 hours, at the gym?"

"Right, I'll see you then."

"If you feel up to it, that is, Bones."

"What about you?"

"I wasn't the one who got hit on the head, remember?" Jim smiled.

I didn't see Jim again until the end of his watch, when I met him in the locker room on Deck 20. He was already kitted out in his judo suit, his black belt firmly wrapped around his waist.

"Sure you feel up to this, Bones?" he asked as I started to strip off.

"Yes, only don't forget it's me who's your opponent."

"Whatever do you mean by that?" Jim smiled. He knew perfectly well what I meant.

"Just remember it's me, not Spock," I reminded him as I pulled on my suit. It'd been ages since I worked out in the gym.

"Don't worry, Bones, I won't forget, and I know all you've done is the basics, so I'll go easy."

I turned to face him. It was no secret that I'd only just passed the basic P.T. course. I wasn't super fit, either.

"Ready?" Jim asked.

"As I'll ever be."

"Are you sure about this?"

"Look, Jim, I shouldn't have been knocked out in my own sickbay. My reactions were slow, so it's about time I did something about it. Let's go."

After our workout we returned to the locker room and changed into our swimming gear. I must admit I had quite enjoyed the session, and had actually managed to throw Jim. Whether he had let me or not I wasn't sure, but I'd managed.

After a quick shower we both headed for the pool, where all hell broke loose. Ian Morris leapt for Jim from behind a partition, ramming a knife at him. Jim managed to side step him, but only just; he'd been caught off balance, and they both landed in the pool.

I hit the wall intercom and summoned Security, while Jim was frantically trying to dodge Morris's attempts to stab him.

"Ian, I'm not to blame for Jenna's death," Jim was yelling.

"You fathered her child. You killed her."

"No, you're wrong. I never touched her," Jim said.

By now fists were flying, and Jim was trying to hold Morris's arm above water.

"Listen, will you, Ian! I never touched her. I found her in bed with our room-mate."

"Liar! She told me it was you."

"Where the hell is Security, Bones?" Jim yelled at me, taking his attention off Ian for a split second.

I dived into the pool at the same instant the knife plunged into Jim's body. The water was already changing colour as the wound bled. I knew Jim wouldn't remain conscious for long, and I was glad that I was a good swimmer.

I reached Jim in seconds. He was conscious, but only just. I couldn't see Morris anywhere, but I wasn't interested in him as I dragged Jim's body to the shallow end of the pool. As I hauled his limp form out of the water all I could think of doing was stopping the bleeding. I didn't see or hear the security team enter the pool area. My hand was clamped firmly over the shoulder wound, stemming the bleeding, and there was no way I was letting go until we reached sickbay and the Intensive Care Unit; if I had Jim would have bled to death in seconds. The knife had severed an artery, and I was holding on to the two ends; there was no way I could have let the pressure off without the right equipment at hand, and that was in the I.C.U.

Kay was already there, along with Joanna and Chris Chapel, who draped a towel over my shoulders as we set to work on the gaping wound. After about an hour of constant work, Kay spoke.

"Len, come on; you've done all you can for the moment. Here, let me look at that eye - that's quite a shiner you've got."

Reluctantly, I let her. It was only then that I realised just

how cold I'd been, operating with just my trunks on, which also meant I must have come up from Deck 20 like that.

"Len, you're burning up!" Kay exclaimed.

"What? Impossible. I'm frozen," I protested as she led me to an empty bed next to Jim's.

"Bed, Len, and that's an order. You've got a temperature of 104."

I had no choice in the matter as Kay settled me in bed. Spock's dressings had been removed, and he was swinging his legs off the bed.

"Doctor, Admiral, I would like to return to duty."

"Oh no you don't, Commander Spock. You're staying put."

Spock settled himself back onto the bed; when Kay used that tone she meant business.

"And you needn't look so smug, Len. You're in bed to stay until I say you can get up. That was quite a little stunt you pulled, racing down the corridor half naked and soaking wet. Just be grateful it's not pneumonia you've got."

Oh boy! I thought as Spock looked at me, his eyebrows reaching his hairline. Jim was conscious now, and he wasn't about to be let off the hook either.

"And you, Captain Kirk, consider yourself lucky to be alive. Really, grown men fighting in a pool."

"Kay..." I said as I tried to sit up.

"Lie down and be quiet."

"But..."

"That's an order, Sherlock Holmes," Kay said.

Spock and Jim looked at each other.

"Who the hell is Sherlock Holmes?" Jim asked.

"A fictional detective of Earth's early 20th century, Captain," Spock enlightened him.

"So why call Bones that?" The anaesthetic was making Jim a little slow at catching on.

"Simply because Sherlock Holmes let everyone else do the leg work, then he worked out whodunnit, set a trap and caught his man," Kay smiled.

"Ah, but..." I tried to break into the conversation, with no luck.

"Len, I said be quiet."

"Sherlock Holmes's partner was Doctor Watson," Spock said as he looked at me.

"Well, Jim, we have our man. He tried to kill himself, but that failed and he's under guard, so I'll leave you to it. In the morning I'll be returning to Starbase 13 with Morris."

"He'll be court martialled, I take it?" Jim asked.

"Yes, provided you press charges."

"What will happen if I don't?"

"I'll have to discharge him as being medically unfit for duty."

"I see."

"Jim, for his own sake, charge him and let him get the help he needs," I said. I'd got my piece in, and I slid under the covers as Kay turned on me.

"Len, shut up."

"Kay, do what you have to do," Jim said.

"Fine. Now you three shut up and get some rest."

"Admiral, I am perfectly all right to return to duty," Spock said.

"You just lie there and shut up as well - and no buts, Bones."

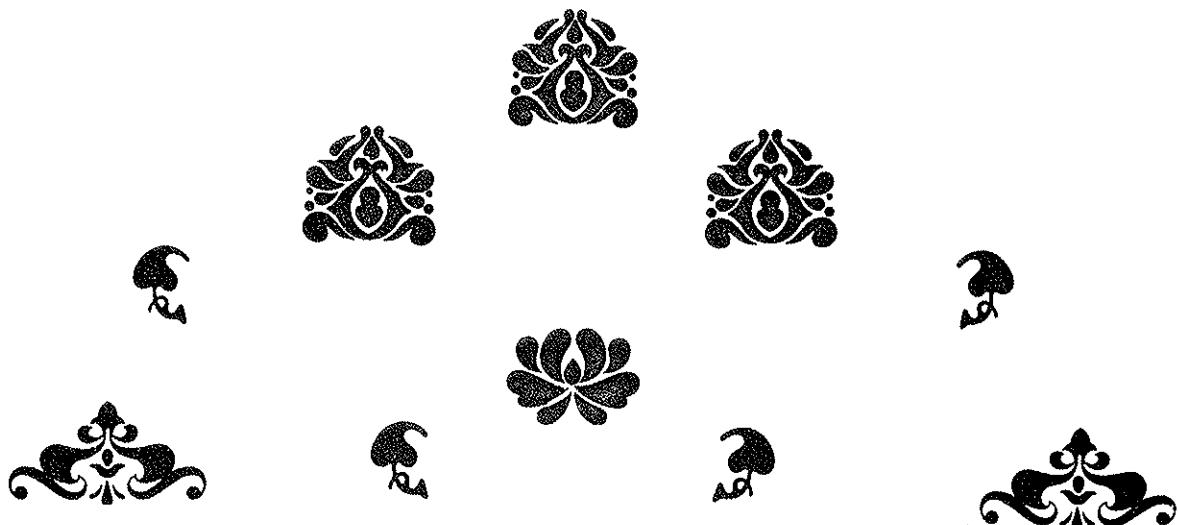
"I didn't say anything!"

"Well, you have now, so shut up."

Kay waited, hands on hips, watching. I clamped my mouth shut. Kay was loving this. Finally she said,

"Well, what do you know? I've actually managed to get the last word in for once."

It shouldn't happen to a doctor, but for yours truly it usually does.



SENTENCED TO... CHRISTMAS DINNER

by

Rosa Caccioppo

The Enterprise was gliding majestically among the stars of the Sagittarius constellation. It was a normal patrol flight, and for days nothing had happened. Captain Kirk called Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy to the briefing room for the weekly report.

"Captain," the First Officer greeted him on entering; he sat down and put the file he had brought with him on the big oval table.

Kirk returned the greeting, nodding, and they kept silent for some moments until McCoy joined them.

"Hi, Jim," he said with his usual informal tone, adding as he sat down, "we've got a problem."

Kirk cast a short glance at him. "Why? What's happened?"

"We're on the verge of starving to death," was the doctor's colourful answer.

Spock raised a quizzical eyebrow.

"What do you mean?" Kirk inquired.

"I've just had a report from Lt. Nahils, who's in charge of the food compartments. We don't know yet how it happened, but all our food is contaminated - tons and tons of useless, rotting supplies. What's worse, the water's tainted too. A couple of days, and you might as well seal the mess room."

"You mean we have no more food?" Kirk paused. "It's impossible!"

"Oh, very possible, Jim. It's been almost five years we've been depending on those supplies."

"Doctor, we have the hydroponic garden, and the synthetic protein reserves," Spock objected coldly.

"The garden can't produce enough fruit and greens, and the synthesiser's blocked," replied the Chief Medical Officer, reading a paper he took from his report. He looked up. "It's the lack of water that's the real problem. A couple of days without food won't kill us - but without water..."

"Well, I'll order a course to the nearest base," Kirk said without batting an eyelid.

"I fear we won't make it," objected McCoy, crossing the fingers of his hands and putting his elbows on the table. "We have water for only two days at maximum."

"How far is Starbase 4 from here?" Kirk asked his First Officer.

"Five days with emergency speed," Spock replied.

Kirk sighed. "Is there any system around here with a Class M planet where we can supply ourselves with food and water?"

"Yes, Captain," answered Spock, after a quiet conversation with the bridge. "Gamma Pendaculi 4. It is a planet similar to Earth. No intelligent life forms, but there is a variety of animals and vegetables. Some of them will certainly be edible, and there is plenty of fresh water."

The doctor cast a look at the Vulcan; those words gave him back his good humour. "Don't worry, Spock. We'll find some green grass adapted to your diet," said McCoy with a sly tone, and Kirk looked askance at him.

The First Officer kept his unexpressive face and did not react. Kirk stretched out his hand and clicked on the intercom.

"Mr. Chekov!"

"Aye, sir," replied the Russian officer from his station on the bridge.

"Compute course for Gamma Pendaculi 4," Kirk ordered.

The navigator smiled. "Already computed and inserted, sir."

Kirk raised his eyebrows, thinking that his officers were becoming telepathic, then he looked at Spock, who had an inscrutable expression. Really, he had the best Science Officer in the 'Fleet.'

"Well, warp speed factor three," he said, and cut the communication; he liked it that Spock had forecast his orders.

McCoy had a feeling he had been made fun of, and stood up. "Thank you from all the crewmen!" he exclaimed in a clear, sarcastic tone.

The Captain looked up and narrowed his eyes without understanding him.

"Even if you don't remember, the day after tomorrow is Christmas on Earth, and the crew would like to eat something special." McCoy paused. "For two years we couldn't celebrate it - perhaps this is the right time."

Kirk grinned and signed the sheets his officers gave him. *Every cloud has a silver lining*, he commented to himself.

The data registered by the sensors confirmed Mr. Spock's words. Gamma Pendaculi 4 was a really rich planet, a sort of terrestrial paradise. Experience had taught Kirk not to trust too much to appearances, so he ordered a general analysis of the surface. He wanted to verify the absolute absence of danger.

Some hours later the First Officer presented his report about the flora and fauna to Dr. McCoy, and together they came back on the bridge.

"This planet is a really inexhaustible supply of food," McCoy

burst out jubilantly with a bright smile on his lips. "We have found enough material to synthesise proteins and vitamins to last a lifetime, and it'll be easy to fill the water tanks."

"We'll have to slaughter a lot of cattle," remarked Kirk, turning his chair on the pivot.

"Yes, of course. Sensors have located a mammal similar to deer," the doctor explained.

Spock scanned him with his usual icy expression, but Kirk could read on his face a feeling of deep disgust. "And what about vegetables?"

"Oh, Spock, you'll have a lot of choice for your plomeek." McCoy rolled his eyes and his voice had a vaguely ironic tone.

Spock's expression seemed remote; he pretended not to have heard, and returned to his station.

Kirk got up with a jerk instead; his voice sounded quiet. "Uhura, inform the transporter room that the first landing party will beam down in ten minutes."

The bridge officers were accustomed to the squabble between the Vulcan and the Chief Medical Officer, but it was better not to go too far.

"Okay, who's coming with me?" asked McCoy, looking around.

"Chekov, Lt. Stevens of Security, the senior biologist, and myself," replied Kirk, moving to the lift.

Spock turned slightly, hoping to be included in the party.

"Sorry, Spock, you'll remain here. I entrust the ship to you," Kirk responded to the silent request of his First Officer, who nodded and sat down in the command chair.

Engineer Scott himself beamed down the landing party onto coordinates based on mathematical analysis. Kirk and his officers materialised at the end of a glade. The landscape around them looked like the savannah. A sea of yellowish grass extended, interrupted by greenish trees full of fruits.

"Everything is edible, even the grass," announced McCoy, reading the data that were passing on the small viewscreen of his tricorder.

"Where are these... these deer?" asked Kirk.

"A few hundred yards from here, to the left," Chekov replied, pointing in the direction.

They moved along, continuing to admire the landscape. Along the way they walked beside a pool; the vegetation around it was thicker, and a lot of coloured birds were whirling in the air. Kirk's attention was attracted by a little group of web-footed birds, which reminded him of the stuffed duck cooked by his mother when he was a child. He shook his head; all this talking about food had almost numbed his mind - last night he had dreamed of a well-laid table with an embroidered cloth!

"What are you thinking about, Jim?" asked McCoy, stopping and glancing at him with a smile.

"Of the Christmases that my family used to celebrate many years ago," answered the Captain, and his tone was not all one of melancholy.

The doctor narrowed his eyes and watched him curiously; the spirit of those words was opposed to the expression on Kirk's face.

"Look over there," he said, pointing to the herd of deer half-hidden among the bushes.

"They are tender, like lambs," said Dr. Hogan, the senior biologist.

"Tom's right!" exclaimed McCoy.

"What?" Kirk was not following the doctor's words.

"I'm thinking of Christmas dinner." McCoy paused. "Instead of the usual artificial food we could..."

Kirk looked at him, expressionless. "You mean you want to roast a deer?" he put forward.

"I think our chef will be happy," McCoy replied, smiling.

The Captain nodded. "I have no objection, if the analysis is positive."

McCoy didn't hesitate, but Dr. Hogan anticipated him. "I assure you it will be," was the biologist's enthusiastic answer.

At that moment a young deer approached the party. It looked more like a reindeer, but its horns were small. The thin skin was hazel, with a black stripe on the back, the tail thick. It didn't show fear, and started nibbling calmly.

Kirk almost felt a sense of guilt. These wonderful animals would meet their end on the Enterprise officers' plates, with some tasty local vegetables.

In the medical lab all was ready to receive the deer. McCoy insisted on the necessity for a detailed analysis before beginning to kill the animals.

Kirk did not want to be present at the killing of the deer; he preferred to beam back to the Enterprise, where he found Spock more silent than usual. He knew it was his First Officer's nature and education that did not allow him to eat meat, and he knew also that Spock loathed the killing of animals for food, and even the breeding of any kind of cattle. He didn't know whether to smile, or remain serious, or attempt a conversation to distract him; finally Kirk decided to do nothing, and gave him a covert look.

Spock was sitting down at his science station, absorbed in his calculations. Suddenly he stood up and took a computer readout. Turning around, he noticed that Kirk was looking at him. He approached the command chair with a quizzical expression.

"Is something wrong, Captain?" he asked.

Kirk waved an arm, shaking his head. "No, I was just thinking. Nothing important. We can talk about it later," he replied, a little embarrassed.

Spock nodded, puzzled. "As you wish, sir." And he went back to his station.

Two hours later McCoy stepped onto the bridge with a triumphant air, drawing upon himself one of Spock's crushing looks.

"This is the invitation to the Christmas dinner," said the doctor, handing Kirk a card.

The Captain read it. The results of the analysis were all positive.

"I have to sign the authorisation?" he sighed.

McCoy's eyes narrowed. "Of course, Jim. You are the Captain."

Kirk shook his head. "But I never commanded a slaughter house."

From his station Spock heard the conversation and turned slightly. Kirk grimaced and signed the card.

McCoy had got what he wanted and was moving to the turbolift when Kirk said,

"Ring the bell when dinner's ready."

The doctor watched him, perplexed, then shrugged his shoulders and decided it was better to return to sickbay.

So it was that Kirk discovered that Lt. Julius Adam Hogan was not only the biologist but also the dietician aboard the Enterprise.

"I thought it was you, Bones, who ordered me those disgusting green diets," he grimaced.

His Chief Medical Officer sat down at his desk and smiled kindly. "I limit myself to establishing how many calories you need. Julius prescribes the diet," he answered, continuing to read a computer readout.

"And how long has Doctor Hogan been on board?" Kirk asked.

McCoy did not answer for a long moment, then looked up. "Since our departure for the five year mission," he said compassionately.

The Captain muttered something unintelligible and leaned against the wall. "I never noticed him... I thought he was just a simple biologist."

"Instead he has two degrees in biology and medicine, and a major in dietology." The doctor switched off the screen and stood up, took a sheet he had just finished writing and inserted it into a file, then put the file into the bottom drawer.

"I didn't know that every ship had a chef with two degrees and a

major," Kirk continued.

McCoy looked at him. He was patience itself. "Jim, you yourself said that you do not command a slaughter house but a cruiser, and Dr. Hogan is not a chef, but a dietician..."

"... who's reduced me to a slim stick!" Kirk ended the sentence and looked down at his stomach.

McCoy slapped him lightly on his tummy. "Listen to your family doctor. There's still fat to take away," he smiled with a sly glance. "Anyway, I'll allow you to take part in the Christmas dinner."

Kirk glanced at him menacingly, then headed for the door.

Christmas Eve finally came. The Enterprise was orbiting Gamma Pendaculi 4. Kirk decided to relax the crew's duty shift slightly, and this was highly appreciated by everybody.

There was an unusually joyful air, and Dr. McCoy personally took care of the dinner for the senior officers; so Kirk made another discovery, that his Chief Medical Officer was a skilled and refined cook. The menu had a lot of delicacies, stuffed chicken, roast turkey, lamb and assorted greens - even if the Earth meat had been replaced by animals found on the planet below.

The dinner was at 23.00 hours, and it was the only time when the doctor wore dress uniform with pleasure. For the event the main rec room became a dining room, and McCoy prepared a Christmas tree, which was arranged in one corner. When Kirk entered the room he found McCoy intent on checking the courses.

"Evening, Bones," he greeted.

The doctor smiled at him. He looked more than satisfied. "That's for you, Jim." He gestured to the tree. "So you won't have to regret the Christmases you spent with your family back in Iowa."

"Thank you. And have you thought about Spock?" Kirk said, scanning the menu; almost all the dishes were based on meat.

McCoy rubbed his hands, adjusted his shirt collar, then uncovered one of the dishes. "Et voila! Green stew with almonds!"

The Captain looked at the strange greenish mush, and grimaced.

"Oh, you don't understand Vulcan cooking," said McCoy, pretending to be annoyed.

The doors swooshed open and Spock entered, wearing his dress uniform, which suited his tall thin figure.

"Speak of the devil and he appears!" the doctor exclaimed as soon as he saw him.

Spock had no time to reply; Scott, Uhura, Chekov and Dr. Hogan arrived in a group.

All liked the dinner. The dishes, prepared with the computer's help, were delicious, and even Spock found his 'green stew' exquisite. No-one tried to make him sample the meat, knowing that the Vulcan abhorred it, and McCoy - as opposed to what Kirk feared - did not tease the First Officer with his almost too sagacious puns. *Christmas makes everybody better*, the Captain thought with a sigh of relief.

They did not drink wine, but at the end of the dinner the Captain allowed a sort of champagne to be served; it was a non-alcoholic liquid made with sugar, vitamins and other substances, very far from the usual grapes. Mr. Scott put forward a strong protest, which Dr. Hogan silenced instantly. Uhura sang some of her best songs, and the evening ended with a friendly exchange of Christmas wishes.

Before going to his quarters Kirk went to the bridge with Spock. Everything was normal, all working perfectly. The science station had been entrusted to Lt. Kyle, and Lt. DeSalle was at the helm, so the two friends retired.

"I think this evening has been the first Christmas on board celebrated according to tradition," said Kirk, walking through the corridor to his quarters; and Spock, at his side, nodded silently.

"On Vulcan... has your mother never talked to you about Earth customs and traditions?" Kirk asked.

Spock did not answer for a long moment, then he said blankly, "Sometimes... when I was a child."

Kirk glanced briefly at him; a gleam of melancholy appeared in his friend's eyes, and he had the umpteenth confirmation that Spock was more Human than he wanted to show.

"Goodnight, Spock, and Merry Christmas," said Kirk before the door to his quarters.

"Goodnight, Captain," Spock answered, then he recalled how Humans liked that particular kind of thing, so he added, "And a Merry Christmas to you, Jim."

It was 05.00 hours, and Mr. Spock was sleeping in his quarters. A typical Vulcan lamp lit the room dimly. All was silent. There was a violent and sudden jolt, and the Vulcan found himself on the floor. The impact startled him out of his sleep. A deep noise made the walls vibrate. He massaged his shoulders and pushed the intercom button.

"Lt. DeSalle, what is happening?" he asked, the tone of his voice easily revealing his worry.

No-one responded.

"Spock to bridge. Bridge, answer, please!"

He had no answer, and switched channels.

"Captain Kirk, this is Spock. Jim!"

No answer. He switched channels again. "Spock to engine room. Engineer Scott! Engineer, what is happening?"

Silence.

The ship jumped again. Without waiting to put on his uniform he took his slippers and hurried out of the door. The corridor was empty. He looked around, heading for the turbolift. Near it he saw a man lying on his back; he rushed to him and bent down, searching for his pulse. The man was alive... and sound asleep. He tried to shake him awake.

"Ensign! Ensign, wake up! What is happening?"

He didn't manage to wake the man, so he left him where he had found him. He caught the lift and gave the voice command.

When the lift doors opened onto the bridge the Enterprise jolted again. He saw an incredible sight. The officers on duty were bent over their stations; they seemed plunged into a very sound sleep.

Horror lit Spock's black eyes. The planet was framed on the big central screen, and the Enterprise had already penetrated the outer atmosphere, as if in free fall. He hurried to the helm, moved DeSalle from his chair, and switched the manual control. The ship was a heavy cruiser, and even if the computer controlled all the systems a single man could not pilot her. And Spock at that moment was alone - alone with a disastrous future.

He blocked the auto pilot and reached the engineering station; he moved the sleeping officer away and sat down, pushing a series of buttons, stabilising the energy flux into the impulse power. Then he turned back to the helm; notwithstanding his efforts, he did not manage to stop the fall.

The speed increased more and more. He switched the manual pilot on again, and with great ability he succeeded in blocking the helm; then into auto pilot and back to the engineering station, where he gave maximum energy and blocked all to the highest power.

He returned to the helm console, and the ship finally began to respond. The Enterprise was rising slowly. Spock observed the data on the monitor of Sulu's panel; bit by bit they were stabilising.

It took the ship eight minutes to reach standard orbit around the planet again, eight minutes during which Spock - for the first time in his life - broke into a cold sweat as he thought only of saving 'his' ship. He did not dislike thinking of the Enterprise in so possessive a way, as a dear thing. His mother herself had told him not to be ashamed of his emotions, and perhaps she was right - it was shameful to show them, not to feel them.

Now the ship was out of danger. He locked her into a temporary orbit and could relax, but only for a moment, because he had to discover what had happened to Kirk and his crewmembers. He headed for the communications station, and switched on the intraship speakers.

"This is First Officer Spock. Those who are able to hear me, please contact the bridge immediately!"

He waited for some moments. There was no answer.

"I repeat, those who are hearing me, contact the bridge at once."

No answer. All was useless. He rubbed his forehead and realised that he was still wearing his pyjamas. He glanced at the helm; now it was all right. He caught the turbolift and headed down to Deck Five. When he reached his quarters he changed hurriedly and took a phaser.

Spock didn't know what had happened. Perhaps some aliens could have beamed on board. He took corridor three, hastening his pace, and arrived in front of Kirk's quarters. He opened the small box at the side, pressed the numbered buttons following a particular sequence, and the door swooshed open.

The room was dark. He turned on the central light and moved to the night area. Kirk was sleeping peacefully in his bed.

"Captain! Captain!". The Vulcan approached the bed and shook his shoulders. "Captain! Jim! Wake up, please!" He slapped him, and shook him again. "Jim! Jim!"

Kirk continued to be plunged into a very deep sleep, without any possibility of being woken from it.

In the end Spock desisted and left Kirk's cabin, deciding to go to McCoy's quarters. He opened the door using the emergency combination and turned on the light, moving towards the bed. The physician was snoring, and Spock sighed.

"Doctor! Doctor McCoy! Please wake up!"

No answer. Instead the snoring increased and the Chief Medical Officer continued to sleep, turning onto his other side. For the scientist it was not logical, and Spock shook him as he had done with Kirk. McCoy moaned softly, but didn't move.

Spock pulled him to a sitting position; his head lolled, and his eyes were closed. He shook him again, without any result. Then he gave him a couple of slaps, which would have woken an elephant, and the doctor replied with another faint moan.

Spock didn't know what to do. He couldn't risk injecting the doctor with a stimulant. Then he recalled the jokes the cadets at the Academy used to play on each other. He laid McCoy on the bed, and went to the bathroom. Taking a bowl he filled it with cold water, returned to McCoy, and threw it in his face.

No result. Spock patiently went to the bathroom again and turned on the shower, then he collected McCoy and dragged him under the cold shower.

After a couple of minutes the doctor opened his eyes, moaning and mumbling senseless words. Spock opened the shower to full force, splashing water all over and soaking himself from head to toes. He supported McCoy upright, then shook him again.

"Doctor! McCoy!"

After some minutes the doctor opened his eyes fully. He felt confused, his vision was blurred and his stomach was queasy. He had

a terrible headache, and his ears were buzzing. It took some time to regain consciousness fully.

"Spock..." he murmured in a drowsy voice, "what the devil possessed you to wake up a poor doctor in this way?"

"Doctor, the ship was about to crash onto the planet below. All the crew are in a state of deep unconsciousness," Spock said.

McCoy widened his eyes, closed them, and opened them again. "Oh my god! I'm feeling so bad," he murmured, and sank down onto the floor, his head between his hands. Then he looked up.

"What do you mean, the ship was crashing? Where?"

Spock watched him harshly. "On Gamma Pendaculi 4."

The doctor swallowed; he was very pale. "Oh god! And... and what was DeSalle doing?"

"He was sleeping."

"Sleeping? On duty?"

Spock nodded, sighing. "He was sleeping, like all the other officers. All the crew are still in a state of deep unconsciousness, including Captain Kirk."

McCoy looked at him, his mouth open with incredulity, unable to believe those words. He stood up, leaning on Spock for support.

"Have you tried to wake them?"

"Only Jim, without result." The Vulcan moved to the doorway. "Dress yourself, Doctor, while I try to wake Mr. Scott."

McCoy nodded, clenching his lips. Slowly he took off his pyjamas, staring at nothing; he was thinking about Spock's statements as he grasped his uniform and put it on hurriedly. He took his right boot and put it on his left foot, and cursed in a low voice; when he had finished dressing he ran through the corridor.

Meanwhile the First Officer had reached Engineer Scott's quarters. He tried the same treatment he had used on McCoy, but this time the morning shower operation did not work. He gave up when McCoy joined him.

"Scott does not wake up."

They passed Uhura's quarters. "We can try with Uhura," McCoy suggested.

They found the Communications Officer sound asleep, and their attempts to wake her were in vain. In the end the doctor noticed that the woman reacted to external stimuli, and decided to take her to sickbay.

"Spock, you go and bring the Captain to sickbay. I want to run a full check on them," said McCoy, who was fully recovered now.

Spock nodded and headed back to Kirk's quarters. His mind was a turmoil of thoughts: the Enterprise about to fall on the planet below; the Christmas dinner; the sleeping officers. And he, himself,

was feeling so strange, unable to clear his mind. What if someone or something was responsible for what was happening?

He lifted the Captain and staggered; he was losing his strength. With an effort he brought Kirk into sickbay and laid him on a bed next to Uhura. McCoy was scanning the diagnostic data on the woman; he raised his head and saw Spock leaning against the wall, his eyes closed, and approached him.

"Spock, how do you feel?" he asked, worried.

"I do not know... I am losing my capacity for concentration... I feel very weak," the Vulcan answered faintly.

The doctor helped him to lie down on another bed.

"I can't... The ship... I must go to the bridge..."

"That's out of the question! First I must discover what's happening to you. Have you engaged the auto pilot?"

Spock nodded, moaning. The doctor switched on the diagnostic panel and read the data as they appeared on the monitor. The readings were very low, as if the Vulcan had been affected by acute anaemia. McCoy let out a sigh of relief. He went to a cabinet, took out a hypo and filled it with a greenish liquid.

"What is that?" Spock asked faintly.

"A heavy stimulant," McCoy replied, pressing the hypo to his arm. "In a couple of minutes you'll feel a wave of heat all over your body."

The First Officer nodded, closing his eyes; he had never felt so weak, so unable to resist.

McCoy checked Uhura next. She had the same symptoms as Spock and Kirk had, but she was the only one to show a higher sign of brain activity. He activated the sickbay computer and got a readout of the appropriate stimulant formula with which to inject Uhura.

He was leaving the room when the Vulcan called him, and he turned back. Spock was lying down on the bed, resting on his elbow.

"Doctor, I am feeling much better now. My strength is coming back."

McCoy held him back and watched the diagnostic panel. Blood pressure, pulse rate, respiration and brain activity were almost normal.

"Yes, Spock, the stimulant did work," he smiled.

They heard a moan coming from Uhura's bed. McCoy hurried to inject her with the stimulant - if it had worked with Spock, it had to work with the Bantu woman too. He glanced worriedly at the Captain and sighed, at that moment feeling his legs trembling. He took the medical Feinberger, passed it over his chest, and read the data; he too was in need of stimulants.

Spock was looking at him, and drew himself to sit up. "Doctor?" But his head was still too heavy.

"It's nothing," replied McCoy, injecting himself with the stimulant. "Lie down."

"You, too, need to rest," the Vulcan objected.

"And you, too!" the doctor retorted.

A few minutes passed in deep silence, then Uhura moaned. The doctor stood up at once, and noticed that the woman was regaining consciousness. She shook her head slightly and opened her eyes, slowly focussing her vision; she felt very weak, as if she was floating in the air, and her head was pounding. She couldn't move a muscle, yet she noticed that at least she could speak.

"Doctor? What... what happened?" she asked in a whisper.

"I don't know yet, but it's almost over now," replied McCoy in a reassuring tone. He turned round, and saw that Spock was standing up.

"Oh, you are a stubborn patient!" McCoy protested, and passed the mediscanner over his body.

"Now I can go back to the bridge," Spock replied firmly.

And the diagnostic scanner confirmed that his readings, and even Uhura's, were normal.

Half an hour later Spock called the survivors to the bridge. The situation was very serious. Of all the 430 crewmembers only three people - himself, Uhura and Dr. McCoy - had been able to overcome the effects of the strange sleep.

"And now what do we do?" asked the doctor, breaking the deep silence.

The Vulcan, bent over his console, didn't answer.

"What's happened to the Captain, to Scotty, to all of us?" Uhura was very worried.

"This will be your job, Doctor," replied Spock, looking from the woman to McCoy. "You must discover why we are awake, why the stimulant worked with us and not with Jim."

The Chief Medical Officer nodded in silence, then added, "As soon as I find something I'll call you," and headed to the turbolift.

Spock remained alone with Uhura. "Lieutenant, try to contact Starbase 4," he ordered, sitting down at the helm to check the Enterprise's temporary orbit.

The woman nodded affirmatively. "Aye, sir." She went to her station and switched on all the subspace radio's channels. "Enterprise to Starbase 4. Emergency, Code 12AX. Enterprise to Starbase 4... Starbase, answer, please. Do you read us?"

But the only answer she got was static. She tried again. "Enterprise calling Starbase 4. Please answer... this is an emergency call... The crew is unable to manoeuvre. Repeat, Emergency Code 12AX..." But the static was louder.

Uhura shook her head desolately, working again in her console without result. Spock approached her.

"Sorry, sir. The sun of Gamma Pendaculi 4 produces a strong interference, and... a magnetic storm is forming."

The First Officer verified the data on his science computer; a very violent storm was indeed approaching. He anchored the ship firmly in orbit and prepared the deflectors. Then he left the bridge and joined McCoy in sickbay, where he informed him of the situation.

"Wonderful!" commented the doctor ironically. "We're just out the frying pan into the fire!"

Spock raised an eyebrow. "Your colourful answer does not solve the problem. I left the helm to Lt. Uhura, and I have stabilised the orbit, so I can help you here," he replied coldly.

McCoy nodded and gave him two sheets full of chemical formulas. "Compare them. They are the data concerning my blood and Jim's."

The two scientists continued to work for hours in silence. Perhaps this was the first time they had found themselves working side by side without the need to bicker with each other and argue. The problem was too important to lose precious time.

The magnetic storm struck the Enterprise with less violence than expected. The deflectors worked magnificently, even if some little jolts did shake the ship, but with no serious damage. Spock did not think it necessary to go to the bridge.

"I can't take any more!" McCoy sighed, slumping down on a chair in his office. "We're back to square one. Our blood, our haemoglobin... all is normal. There must be something..."

Spock turned to look at him, his face showing no emotion. He too felt tired, but this time it was due to their working around the clock.

The doctor frowned. The Vulcan's apparent calm got on his nerves. Spock fixed him with a stare of unusual intensity, his mind pondering over the formulas he had just seen.

"Meat!" he exclaimed suddenly, startling McCoy, who looked at him in pure dismay.

"What do you mean?"

"Doctor, all the crew ate meat," Spock replied, crossing his arms.

"So did Uhura and I... and we could wake up," McCoy objected.

That was true, but Spock's mind was after an idea of its own.

"In any case, we can analyse the meat again," McCoy said lamely, and stood up. "I'm going down to bring it."

Spock nodded. "Meanwhile I'll run a complete check of the Captain's and Uhura's gastric juices." He sat down and recalled on the screen all the data of the previous analysis. They had to start

again from scratch, and look for some kind of soporific substance.

McCoy reached the mess room, and found the remains of the Christmas dinner on the tables. He took a tray with deer chops and sniffed it. Incredible! The meat had such a delicate, inviting smell. Dr. Hogan had carried out a very careful analysis, and the result had been that the meat was safe and edible. Could Spock be right? He covered the tray, and went to the turbolift.

Spock was a thorough scientist as well as being an excellent First Officer, and he proved that during the analysis of the venison McCoy had brought him. The doctor couldn't help but admit it.

After what seemed like hours the Vulcan raised his eyes from the microscope. "Rhetyl beta-chloride!" he said.

McCoy, who was studying a chemical reaction, turned suddenly. "Don't make me laugh! That's innocuous - it's a laxative!"

"Of course - if it doesn't combine itself with thuryngin mono-oxide," Spock objected with the air of someone explaining something to a child.

The doctor stared at him. Similar compounds were very rare. He stood up and approached Spock, who pushed a button on the board. The Vulcan had hypothesised the union of the two substances during the digestive process, and after some moments a series of formulas appeared on the monitor. McCoy recognised all the substances, which were involved in the digestive process. And the result... His eyes widened. "Good heavens!" he exclaimed.

"The substance blocks the principal nerve centres and causes a very sound sleep," the Vulcan remarked with cold competence.

"Wait a moment, Spock." McCoy pointed at the screen. "I want to know why only we three are awake." He inserted their diagnostic data, and an instant later the response appeared.

"Spock, a vitamin! It's a vitamin!" the doctor exclaimed, and grinned.

"Exactly. This vitamin was in the stimulant which you gave us, and also in the pills both Uhura and I took some days ago," confirmed the Vulcan.

McCoy turned pale and looked sombrely at Spock. "I'm afraid we're in big trouble." He bit his lips.

The First Officer assumed an incredulous expression. Humans were really strange. They had just discovered the origin of their problem, and instead of being happy McCoy began to tremble.

"Why?"

"Vitamin H is one of the medicines I've put on the list of supplies. There are only a few doses left, just enough for the three of us, if we want to keep immune to that stuff, which is still circulating in our blood."

The Vulcan kept his inscrutable expression. "It will not be easy, but even with a crew of three people we must reach Starbase 4," he said, clasping his arms behind his back.

McCoy shook his head and sank down into a chair. "Two people, Spock. I'm a doctor, not an engineer," he protested in a grating voice.

Spock did not answer, and moved to the doorway, then he turned back. "I need someone in the engineering room, and you will go there."

McCoy stood up, narrowing his eyes. "Maybe I haven't made myself clear. I am not an engineer," he repeated angrily.

Spock looked at him silently for a moment with biblical patience. "I will teach you," he replied, going out.

Starfleet rules did not provide for - indeed, they prohibited - the transfer of an officer from one section to another. But... desperate ills demand desperate remedies, and so the Chief Medical Officer replaced the Chief Engineer. Unfortunately, a medical degree had nothing to do with warp engines. McCoy, after his one attempt to protest, went down to the engineering room muttering and cursing.

Spock preferred not to reply - he had more important things to tend to. He had to take the Enterprise to Starbase 4, which was about five days away at warp 3; in addition, none of them could allow themselves to sleep, not even for a moment.

It was the most unusual journey ever made by the Enterprise. After four and a half days the communications system was free of the interference of the magnetic storm, and so Uhura could finally open a channel to Starbase 4.

"This is the Starship Enterprise. We are travelling on Code 12AX emergency situation with only three officers in command. We request immediate help... I repeat, emergency on board the Starship Enterprise... Starbase 4, can you read us?"

Uhura's tired voice echoed in the base control room. Commodore Wiston Yerby widened his eyes - he couldn't believe his ears. From the subspace radio speaker the Enterprise Communications Officer's voice came again.

"Repeat, this is the Starship Enterprise..."

Yerby quickly pushed a button on the central console. "Commodore Yerby here. We give you emergency priority. Please acknowledge," he answered.

"Enterprise here. We acknowledge your message," Uhura replied, and her voice seemed to come from the tomb.

Spock was the only one able to explain to Commodore Yerby what had happened aboard. The Enterprise was in temporary orbit around Starbase 4 when Uhura rested her head on her console, exhausted. McCoy was so tired he couldn't even think. The First Officer's physique was stronger, and he endured the stress better, but after his report to the Commodore he too collapsed.

Starbase 4 was located on a Class M planet, and was one of the biggest Starfleet bases. Its staff was composed of 10,000 people,

researchers, officers and cadets, and its medical facilities were excellent. Its medical personnel had a long task ahead, to wake up those who were now called 'The Sleeping Beauties of the Enterprise'.

McCoy and Spock regained their strength in a few days, and Dr. Larkin, the Chief Medical Officer of the Starbase, informed them that Captain Kirk was on the way to a full recovery.

They found him lying on the bed in a nice and sunny room.

"You've arrived just in time," said Larkin, smiling as he saw them entering, now fresh and rested. He pointed at Kirk. "He should wake up in a few minutes."

His words were a sort of alarm clock for the Captain, who stirred in his bed and opened his eyes slightly. He saw his two officers at the foot of his bed. McCoy had a friendly smile on his face, and Spock, as usual, was very serious, though nevertheless he appeared very relaxed.

"Where am I?" Kirk asked.

"On Starbase 4," the First Officer answered without any inflection, crossing his arms on his chest.

"And how did I come here?" Kirk asked curiously.

"Oh, it's a long story, starting with the Christmas dinner," replied Spock, keeping his stern air.

Dr. McCoy was silent, and this was very unusual for his character. Kirk scanned him with almost piercing eyes.

"Bones, what are you thinking about? You look worried."

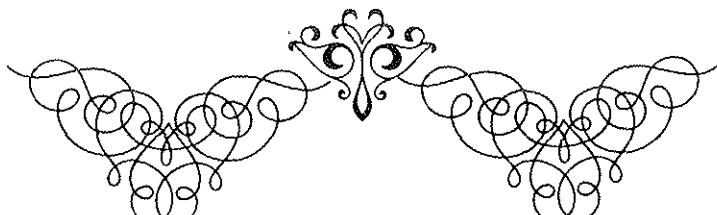
McCoy remained silent, then sighed and turned to Spock. "I'm thinking seriously of asking for a transfer to the Engineering Section," he answered coldly.

The Vulcan gave a side glance at him without reacting.

Dr. Larkin assumed a grotesque expression. He knew that the Enterprise's officers were extraordinary men, but that was really beyond his imagination. A physician, and a Chief Medical Officer for that matter, who asked for a transfer to Engineering - that was incredible!

Kirk sat up, leaning on his elbow, and looked at his friends. Sometimes he completely failed to understand them.

The author thanks Miss Manuela Reitano for her help in translating.



LOST

by

Elaine Sheard

Spock's visit to Levinera was partly on account of Professor Denver's lectures on temporal phases, and partly to visit, at his mother's request, his father's cousin and his new wife. It was on the third day of the course that things became difficult. The Professor began by putting forth a new line of research and concluded by quoting from a Vulcan scientist's work to support his theory. Spock could not accept this and stood up to say so. The professor listened then replied tartly.

"I think your understanding of this thesis is incomplete. A Starfleet Science Officer is no doubt well enough qualified, but even though not new this work can present difficulties."

"It is obviously not understood by you, Professor. It is some of my earlier work, and I can tell you that your somewhat tentative conclusions are in fact repudiated by this paper."

The professor's outrage made him say rashly, "Nonsense, the authorship of this work is well known and has nothing to do with you or Starfleet."

Spock sighed to himself. Really, these emotional beings sometimes seemed incapable of rational thought. All the Vulcans present had no such difficulty and stood and made ready to leave. Spock continued, "Since I did this research under my family name before I joined Starfleet, you could perhaps have thought that until I informed you otherwise; but, of course, now you must accept my criticism as valid."

The reaction of his Vulcan audience was not lost on the professor, who replied faintly, "Yes, well that being the case I shall have to re-examine the whole concept and apologise for my hasty words."

Though Spock had accepted the apology he considered attending any more of the lectures as pointless. His original intention had been to leave to rejoin his ship at the end of the course by travelling on a standard flight, but now he decided to revise his plans.

Whatever had made his family disapprove of his host's marriage he had been careful not to enquire. They had his parents' support and had indeed proved a model of Vulcan hospitality, so he had no qualms about telling them of his early departure. He therefore decided to visit the local hire centre to obtain a ship to carry out his plans. The proprietor was a rather surly individual, but the vehicles appeared sound.

The arrangements having been made and his farewells said, Spock set out for the Starbase where the Enterprise was being refitted. Levinera was a long-standing Vulcan colony on the edge of Federation space; the journey would take four days, half as long as the less

direct route of the standard flight. The area was of some interest as it was one of asteroid belts and small planetoids round a distant sun. To a pilot of experience it presented no danger, or would not have done had it not been for a major malfunction of the ship. Spock did all he could, but it was not enough. He knew it would only be a matter of time before he collided with an asteroid. He decided to look for the largest of these and effect a landing while he still had some measure of control. There, hidden behind a cluster of smaller rocks was, a large planetoid. With no time to look further, Spock put the ship down as carefully as he could. The planetoid was much larger than any previously known in the area, large enough in fact to have an atmosphere. Spock's first task therefore was to check this.

The air was breathable and the humidity not too uncomfortable for a Vulcan. The area surrounding the landing site was one of tall trees and dense undergrowth. Spock was comparatively undamaged. The same could not be said of the ship, which had suffered extensively. Though the interior was largely intact, the chances of the craft's flying again were small. The emergency beacon was still working but was not powerful enough to counteract the radio interference in the area. Spock therefore made preparations for an extended stay. Water was no problem, but, in spite of there being many plants, fruit appeared scarce.

After three days Spock made ready to explore his less immediate surroundings. He set out at daybreak, walking steadily, finding the going possible if care was taken choosing the way. He saw many insects, and, as the day advanced, quick sights of small animals. Yet when a much larger animal saw him he was unaware of the fact until just before it attacked. He half turned as he heard a snarl but was not quick enough to entirely avoid the large cat-like creature which jumped at him, clawing his shoulder and arm as it passed. The ensuing struggle was fierce but brief, the animal being fortunately susceptible to the neck-pinch. However, when at last it was still, it had fallen across Spock's legs, not only breaking them but pinning him to the ground. His phaser, along with most of his other equipment, was missing and some rather painful struggling failed to part the two bloody antagonists.

Spock, resting after one such attempt, heard a sound behind him. Unable to turn he awaited events. First he saw a hand holding a large knife then a small, fur clad body. He didn't need to see more for as the knife was lifted above his head he had a chance to examine its design and recognise it as Klingon. He calmly awaited his fate, aware that a Klingon blade might be almost a kindness. Yet when the knife fell it went not into Vulcan but into animal flesh. As the knife wielder began quickly to skin the cat and then dismember it he addressed Spock in badly accented intergalactic.

"We must hurry, these cats hunt in pairs. I'll cut away what I can while you keep trying to get your legs free."

This was not achieved without much mixing of Vulcan and animal blood, but at last Spock was able to extricate himself from his precarious position. His left leg was badly fractured, with the bone protruding from the flesh. The right, though broken, was not bleeding. While Spock was assessing his injuries the young man looked about the clearing and gathered Spock's possessions. He had just come across the medical equipment when both men heard the sound of the undergrowth rustling, and there at the other side of the clearing was another cat very like the first, presumably the dead animal's mate. It stopped and sniffed the air and then seemed to reach a decision.

Spock said urgently, "Quickly, try to find my phaser."

The youth looked round desperately but abandoned the search as the animal made ready to spring. The cat chose Spock as its target and seizing this opportunity the younger man, with his knife gripped in his hand, jumped on the cat's back. The struggle was not an easy one but the animal's anger told against it. While it indulged in a loud roar the knife was employed and the cat lay dead with its throat cut from ear to ear. The youth lay on the ground, his breath coming in harsh gasps.

Spock had now dealt with his injuries enough to address the other calmly. "You put yourself in considerable danger to aid a stranger; not the behaviour I would have expected of a Klingon."

"You know all about us, do you, Romulan? Though perhaps you are right, as there is some help I need from you."

Spock raised an eyebrow at this. "I do not at the moment seem able to help even myself, and furthermore must inform you that I am Vulcan, not Romulan."

"Well, whatever you are we have to get away from here before dark, as the smell of blood will bring all the animals from miles around." As he spoke the youth was searching the bushes and at last came across Spock's phaser, which he put into his belt. He then turned to Spock. "If I help you to stand do you think you can walk?"

"No, I am sure I cannot," was the even reply.

"Well, we'll have to try something else then." With this the youth brought the skin taken from the cat and unceremoniously rolled Spock into it and began to drag it through the undergrowth. The smell was rank and took the last of the Vulcan's senses, and he descended into darkness.

When he recovered consciousness it was night, and he was cold and in considerable pain. Spock ignored the first and dealt with the second as best he could before addressing the Klingon, whom he could feel just behind him. He asked, "Where are we, and why are you holding me in this way?"

"We are halfway up a tree, the only place I could drag you in time to be safe. As for my touch, it's either that or fall off the branch; there's not much room up here."

Spock was silent. The night passed. It was not one which even a Vulcan would recall without some feeling. At last it began to get light and the Klingon youth began to stir. They were not in truth very high, about ten feet, but it was with some difficulty that the ground was reached. A rope of vegetable fibre had to be employed. This left Spock breathless and in some pain. The Klingon youth coiled the rope and gathered their possessions into a small bag. He put both his knife and Spock's phaser into his belt and turned to Spock.

"I have found a cave about four hours' walk from here, but with you as you are it will take most of the day to get there."

"You propose to take me with you?"

"You can't manage on your own. Anyway, as I said, I am in need of your help; but first we must get somewhere safe and get you fit."

He then began to collect fallen branches and started to construct a frame with which he might pull Spock along.

After some minutes Spock said, "Your reasoning seems logical. Since we are to travel together, would it not be as well if we knew each other's name?"

"I suppose so. My name's Barel, what's yours?"

"My name is Spock. You appear to be of Klingon stock. The language you speak and the design of your knife tell me that you are not native to this place. How did you come to be here?"

"I was travelling with my master and a pilot when we hit an ion storm and were forced to land here. Both the others were killed."

"How long have you been here?"

"435 days. The days seem a little shorter than those on Klingon, so it's hard to say for sure."

Spock did a rough calculation. Between nine and twelve standard months he estimated.

"I notice the collar you wear around your neck gives you some breathing difficulties. Does it perhaps have some cultural significance?"

"I am a bond-servant. Are there not such on Vulcan?"

"No, though I have heard of this practise. It is not an agreement a Vulcan would be party to, especially when it involves children."

"We can't all be so high and mighty Vulcan. This collar shows my place in society. It causes no problems if it is replaced every year."

"You have no way of removing it?"

"No, it is made of metal."

"It would appear to have served one purpose already. Your need for help was perhaps the reason you aided me?"

"Yes, though there is no saying that I wouldn't have anyway."

"I stand corrected. Perhaps I owe you an apology?"

"There's no need for that, I'm not sure what my reasons were. Come, I'll tie you to this frame. If we can get to the buffalo trail, which is about half a mile from here, we should make better progress."

This proved, after some initial struggle, to be the case. Even so it was almost dusk before their destination was reached. This appeared at first to be merely a waterfall. The frame having been abandoned, however, the youth helped Spock into the cave hidden behind the falls. This proved quite large and warm. Spock was placed on a blanket and the young man went outside to retrieve their possessions.

After some minutes Spock was able to examine his surroundings by

the light of some luminous moss which clung to the walls. There was little apart from blankets, animal skins and some cooking utensils. However, there was a pool to one side from which steam was rising, indicating that it was fed by hot springs. After testing both the temperature and the depth of the pool Spock decided that it might fulfil both medical and hygienic requirements and lowered himself into the water, clothes, splints and all.

When Barel returned he asked in surprise, "Do you think that's wise?"

"I can think of no better way of removing foreign bodies and easing discomfort."

"Discomfort? You almost passed out on the last part of our journey."

"Perhaps, but this can be corrected if the necessary medical procedures are followed. If you will give me further aid I will enter a healing trance and remedy the situation."

Barel seemed to find his part in this rather amusing but made sure he understood the process. "Once you enter the healing trance you want me to wait until you become restive then strike you hard until you tell me to stop?"

"That is correct."

The youth then handed a box to Spock, saying, "This is the medical kit from the ship. Perhaps you might find it useful."

"Indeed, it could hardly be less so than the one from my ship." Though the drugs were best avoided, the auto. splints and skin-suture gun were put to good use. At last, cleaned and re-bandaged to the best of their combined abilities, Spock entered a healing trance.

When he regained consciousness, the Klingon youth having fulfilled his part, Spock determined his condition. Though the splints had held the leg bones in position and they had begun to knit, the fusion was by no means complete. Spock could stand, but only with difficulty. He explained to Barel, "I shall have to rest my legs in the next few days to ensure a complete recovery."

"There's enough meat to last us a while, so we should have something to eat at least."

"That could present a problem, as Vulcans do not eat meat."

"In that case there's only figs and a kind of porridge made from roots, though things will improve as the trees come into fruit."

"I shall no doubt manage with what is available. Can these things be obtained nearby?"

"Yes and I can help if necessary."

"Very well. If you will now allow me to examine the collar you wear I will see if I can make some contribution to our relationship."

"Let's hope you can, though it's already been nice to have someone to talk to - even if you do use such long sentences."

Spock ignored the comment, but after studying the collar said,

"This is made of an amalgam, so if I set the phaser in a narrow beam I should be able to part the metal. However, we must find something to protect your flesh while this is being attempted."

"That sounds like a good idea. Have you anything in mind?"

"Not at the moment."

After they had gone through their joint possessions, the only thing found at all suitable was from the inside of the tricorder. Spock therefore saw no alternative but to dismantle this and utilise the part. He had begun this task as he spoke.

"There are some ointments in your medical kit which could prove useful. Perhaps you could read the instructions and have them ready for use."

"Couldn't you do that?"

"The instructions are of the simplest; you should therefore have no difficulty."

"Oh, so you can read Klingon, can you?"

"Yes, the instructions are in Armalet, the most widely used Klingon language - the one indeed I have heard you speak."

"Of course I can speak it, and intergalactic, as my master travelled off planet, but that is all that is necessary."

"You cannot read? Why is that?"

"I can do my work without any need for such knowledge."

"That is most unfortunate. Though it is over a thousand years since there was slavery on Vulcan, even then the owners had duties towards their property - which included an acceptable standard of education."

"I don't see what that's got to do with it. Anyway, the only slaves on Klingon are aliens, even an odd Vulcan, I believe, though they tend to kill themselves or go mad."

"Understandable."

Barel glared at Spock who, ignoring this, finished his task. He then read the instructions on the Klingon drugs and gave two to Barel, saying, "This is to prevent infections and this is advantageous in the case of burns. Now, are you willing to trust me to attempt to remove this impediment to your breathing?"

"I don't have much choice, do I?"

"Yes, but not one I should recommend."

"There you are then, so let's get on with it."

The youth was not quite successful in hiding his unease but he allowed Spock to position the shield he had fashioned and then knelt as instructed with the collar resting against a rock. Spock held the phaser on the edge of the collar and fired a narrow beam. It took only ten seconds to complete the task; even so the heat was intense and Barel's breathing was laboured.

Spock waited for the metal to cool and then grasped the severed edges and pulled. After some hesitation the collar gave and he was able to remove the whole thing. Barel felt his now exposed neck carefully while Spock sat down and rested. He then said, "May I suggest that you follow my example and ease any discomfort by immersion in the hot water of the pool."

"Are you saying that my clothes are dirty?"

"If their smell is anything to go by, yes."

Barel muttered darkly at this, but he eventually removed the offending garments and slowly lowered himself into the pool, saying as he did so, "Animal skins are bound to smell a bit however much you wash or scrape them."

"That is probably true. Was all the clothing in your ship destroyed?"

"No, only the instruments were damaged, and of course the men who were using them were killed. My clothes have worn out and I didn't like to take any of the others' things."

"Surely there could be no objection in the circumstances."

"I couldn't be sure of that."

"When my legs are stronger we must visit both vessels and see if we cannot make at least one of them serviceable. We can look for additional clothing while we are there."

"What's the good of mending the ships if we haven't a pilot?"

"I was my own pilot, and if either vehicle can be repaired I should have no difficulty in getting away from this planetoid."

"You Vulcans seem to think you can do anything, but what are you going to do if you end up with a Klingon ship?"

"Since we are not at war, and my expertise is the only way the owner is likely to recover his property, he will no doubt be grateful."

"I wouldn't count on it."

"Do you however agree that examination of these ships would be useful?"

"I suppose so."

"I cannot understand your hostility; my presence here has greatly increased your chances of leaving this world."

The boy couldn't keep anger out of his voice. "No doubt the sooner you can get away from an illiterate lout like me the better."

"You have shown both compassion and courage, and your lack of education is hardly your fault. If you wish, I can, while I am gaining enough strength to travel, teach you to both read and write your principle language."

"You know all about it, then?"

"Enough to undertake this task, certainly. You appear to resent the fact."

"I don't suppose you can help being such a know-it-all, and it might come in useful when I get home."

Captain Kirk examined the owner of the hire centre with disfavour. "I don't think you understand me, Cole. You can't just shrug off your responsibility for the ship's disappearance. If you co-operate I just might put in a good word for you with the Vulcan authorities. My First Officer is a member of the Governor's family and you know how these Vulcans stick together. If he doesn't find a way of dealing with you, Starfleet will."

The other man tried to be friendly. "Now there's no need to be like that, Captain. I bought those vehicles in good faith. You can't expect me to allow your engineer to take them apart just to see if they have a common fault."

"I can and I do. If you help us, we might just put them together again, but one way or another I'll find out what kind of junk you lent my First Officer if it takes the rest of your life. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Captain, though you won't be able to stay here for ever."

"Long enough to sort this out, you can be sure of that."

It was some three days later that Mr. Scott made his report to the Captain. "I've looked at the remaining ships and they all have to one degree or another a fault in the main drive. The materials used were substandard."

"Did you manage to salvage any of the ships?"

"I did not. They were just not worth repairing. Mr. Cole is not only going to lose his franchise with the hire company, but is likely to be in financial hot water as well."

"It serves him right. Now we know Spock's approximate route and the trouble he must have experienced, we can pinpoint the area of search."

"It's a big mess out there, what with the asteroids and the stellar dust, Captain."

"We'll find a way, Scotty. I am going to stay here as long as possible. Spock was Saret's guest; I think Starfleet is going to listen to reason on this one."

In the next few weeks Barel showed the Vulcan the secrets of the planetoid while Spock introduced him to the twists of the Klingon written language. He proved to be an apt pupil and intergalactic was also soon included in the lessons. Since Barel could already speak it, progress was maintained in this. After about a month, Spock had improved so much that he decided he was now able to visit the Klingon ship. This was in a different direction from Spock's and as he could

not walk quickly it took most of the day to get there. The undergrowth had already started to grow around the ship, but it was still intact. Spock looked first at the hull, and having decided this was undamaged they both entered the vessel where they were to spend the night. After careful examination of the computers, Spock told Barel, "Externally the ship is in good condition and the environmental controls are working well. Though the navigation and communication computers are badly damaged I should be able to repair them using the parts taken from my ship."

"You can really do that?"

"It is well within my capabilities."

"I can hardly believe this. It looks as though we might actually have a chance of leaving here."

"When using equipment of different designs there is a higher risk of breakdown, but it is one which I consider acceptable."

"That's all right by me then, I'll help in any way I can."

The next day they retraced their steps and after spending a night in the cave set out for Spock's ship, arriving about mid-day. Spock began to dismantle the computers immediately and removing the parts he thought he would need; he also collected the rest of his things. Meanwhile Barel constructed another wooden frame. As soon as it was light next day they loaded the parts onto this and set out once more. They were to spend a last night in the cave and go on next day.

That evening as Spock bathed in the pool before changing his clothes he began to make plans.

"It should not be necessary for us to return here. While I repair the ship you can gather enough food to sustain us on our journey. The stores are somewhat depleted, but there is enough water to present no problem."

As he finished bathing Spock began to put on his uniform, now the only clothing left to him. Barel observed this with something like horror. "You can't wear that, there must be some penalty for wearing a military uniform to which you are not entitled."

"There would be, perhaps, were I not in fact a Starfleet Officer."

Spock was examining the rest of his possessions and did not see the effect of his statement. After some minutes' silence, however, he became somewhat uneasy. After all Barel was rather unpredictable and he did still have the phaser. Yet, when he turned, the youth - far from being threatening - was kneeling on the floor with head bowed. Spock asked, "Are you feeling ill?"

"Sir, I meant no disrespect. You said you were a scientist! I didn't know you were a Starfleet Officer. I wouldn't have been so rude to you."

"Stand up. I know Klingon is a military society, but the only respect most Klingons show me is to wish me harm."

"Even so, they are your equal; I am not."

"It is true that the Imperial Fleet seems to find special glory in opposing the Enterprise, but I find no favour in that."

"You are the Spock who is the First Officer of the U.S.S. Enterprise?"

"That is correct."

"You and your Captain are held in high esteem by our Fleet officers."

"We are the ones they would most like to be matched against if there were renewed hostilities between our alliances. I do not regard that as a compliment."

"Nevertheless, it would be expected that I give you the respect your position entitles you to."

"On Vulcan, Starfleet Officers are regarded as a necessary evil, but being of their number is not seen as an ideal occupation for our nationals. Any respect I might be given is as a scientist. You have been my host while I have been here. As your teacher I could expect you to defer to me, but anything else is quite unnecessary."

"You do have an unusual way of looking at things."

"Customs do differ, but in the position we find ourselves in mutual respect is all that is needed. I trust that will continue to be the case."

Nothing more was said on the subject and next day they set out for the Klingon ship. Barel had shown quite an interest in language and had formed the habit of asking about the Vulcan equivalent of Klingon words; he now tentatively continued this practice. By chance the name of a type of tree was a word which had a somewhat vulgar meaning in Klingon. Barel could not hide his amusement. Spock merely corrected his pronunciation but this did clear the air a little.

When they reached the Klingon vehicle Spock set to work while Barel unloaded the parts. He then left the Vulcan to it and went to check the rest of the ship. When he returned to the control room he was carrying a bundle. He said, "I suppose it will be all right to wear the pilot's clothes. If we get to a Federation outpost I can at least look civilized when I get to the detention centre."

Spock raised an eyebrow at this. "You have been listening to Klingon propaganda. There is no state of war between our peoples. You will be treated as a guest until you can be repatriated. I will see that this ship is put in proper order. You should be well received if your master's property is returned with you."

"Are you sure of that? I know you have Klingon prisons - I have heard of people who have spent time there. Perhaps you Vulcans don't know what is really going on."

"You forget I am a Starfleet officer. We only imprison those who break Federation law and they are returned to their home world as soon as possible. We may find ourselves in Klingon space and be picked up by a Klingon vessel. The modifications I am making to this ship are not classified so it would no doubt be returned to its owner without delay."

"Yes, but what would happen to you if we were picked up by my people?"

"I am known to the Imperial Fleet; they are aware I will not divulge Starfleet secrets. The recent trade agreement is most useful to your worlds; in time, I may well be exchanged."

"It could well depend on whose prisoner you became."

"Let us trust logic would prevail. However, this need not concern you."

"Sorry about this, Commander Spock, sir, but it does."

The conversion took two days and in that time Barel managed to fill the ship's stores with fruit and edible roots. The planetoid was almost a world in itself and the cloud of smaller rocks and dust that circled it made viewing the stars impossible. Despite this Spock encountered no real difficulty as he started the vessel, and using manual control soon had it lifting from the ground and heading out through the cosmic debris. When they had cleared this, Spock studied the stars, trying to establish their position in the asteroid field's large circle round its distant sun. He then told Barel, "At a safe speed for this vehicle we are three days from the nearest Klingon space and seven from Federation territory. I am therefore setting course for Melton, the nearest Klingon outpost, so you have no need to worry about Federation hospitality."

"I have accepted your reassurance about that but I don't think your chances as a Klingon prisoner are as good. I'd feel a lot better if you set a heading for your section of space."

"You do realise that there is a 10% chance of equipment malfunction before we are picked up?"

"My chances of leaving that asteroid were nil before you came along, so I call those pretty good odds. Please change the heading and make us both feel a lot more comfortable."

"Very well, if that is what you want."

"It is."

The trip was, for the most part, uneventful. The lessons continued, though there were times when even Barel was quiet. Spock had thought it wise to instruct the young Klingon in the piloting of the ship. On the sixth day of the journey he had left him in charge while using one of the cabins for meditation when the ship suddenly began to shake violently. Barel examined the controls in panic as Spock re-entered the control room. "I didn't do anything, I promise. The communication console gave a kind of squeak and then the ship began to jump about."

"You are not responsible. We have been seized by a tractor beam. Since the communication system could well have been faulty our lack of response must have led someone to think we were hostile. We must await events and trust that the ship can stand the strain."

After about twenty minutes things began to calm down and at last they appeared to be stationary. Spock read the dials and then said, "We seem to be inside some kind of vessel since the atmosphere

outside registers as breathable. I have released the door. It would be as well, I think, to allow our captors to initiate contact."

Spock showed no apprehension, but Barel looked decidedly uneasy as they waited. At last the door opened and two men entered, dressed in the red of Starfleet security and carrying drawn phasers. When they saw Spock dressed in Starfleet uniform calmly observing them, they stopped in surprise. "Mr. Spock! It's you, sir," gasped one of the startled officers.

"As you can see, Mr. Crispin. Now, if you will lower your phaser and allow me to leave this vehicle..."

"Yes, of course, sir. The Captain will be pleased to see you. But - what about the Klingon?"

Spock looked at Barel, whose approaching maturity made his question at least sensible.

"I will vouch for the young man."

"If you say so, sir."

The Lieutenant stood aside and let the two leave the ship. Here, waiting, were more security men and Captain Kirk and Dr. McCoy. The latter exclaimed, "Good Lord, it's Spock! Only he could arrive in a Klingon ship looking as though he's just come off parade!"

"Spock, it is you! What are you doing on a Klingon vessel? And why didn't you answer our signal?"

"I was attempting to enter Federation space and a malfunction made me unaware that anyone was trying to contact us."

"We've been tracking your craft for the last 24 hours and came over to investigate. Now come on, tell us what you've been up to."

Explanations followed, Spock's about his journey and the discovery of the planetoid and Captain Kirk's about his determination to stay in the area as long as possible. Spock then introduced Barel and went on to talk about the planetoid. "There has been no indication of a body of such size in the asteroid ring. The fact that it has an atmosphere and both plant and animal life is of great interest."

"Yes, the Federation will want to explore it, no doubt."

"Since Barel was the first one to arrive there, that could well be a Klingon perogative."

"Well, we'll let the lawyers sort that out. I don't think Barel is a security risk, so when the Doctor has checked you both perhaps you'd like to arrange for someone to show him the ship."

"Indeed, Captain, I think he will be most interested."

Barel found both the ship and the crew very confusing, from Dr. McCoy gruff kindness to the polite questions about his stay on the planetoid with Mr. Spock. Once the facts had been established he was treated as a honoured guest, even by the members of security. The Doctor told him, "You saved Spock's life. That's enough for most of us. Apart from anything else having him back certainly makes the

Captain easier to live with!"

Barel wasn't sure if he was joking or not. His master's ship was examined and repaired and a few days later Spock asked him to his cabin to tell him, "The ship is now spaceworthy and can be returned to its owner as soon as Starfleet gives permission. However, before these arrangements are made, there is something I must say to you. Your position on Klingon is far from ideal, and if you were to make an application for sanctuary in the Federation it would probably be granted."

"Are you trying to insult me? I am a Klingon, and whatever the future holds for me I don't want to be anything else."

"No insult was intended. I considered it my duty to make the proposition, though I think you are wise to reject it."

"Perhaps you think if I stay in the Federation you would have a better claim to the planetoid."

"Now **you** are being deliberately offensive. I do not think you truly believe that to be the case; you appear to almost need an excuse to think ill of us."

"I never suspected your motive, but you might have been ordered to make this offer."

"I would not have obeyed such an order without giving you the full facts. You misjudge the Federation. However, we know that only if trust and understanding are established is there a chance of lasting peace between our peoples."

"It sounds very fine but I'm not sure that it's possible."

"There is an excellent understanding between us. If that is possible between two beings why not between nations?"

"There are very few Klingons who think like you, Mr. Spock. Even so, I shall be glad to get home."

"Understandable. Live long and prosper, Barel. It has been an honour to have known you."

"For me, too. Thank you for the lessons - and if we should meet again I trust it will be in Federation rather than Klingon space."

"I appreciate that, Barel."

After Barel had left the Starbase to be escorted back to Klingon space, Captain Kirk observed to his First Officer, "You can't help liking the lad. You got to know him well while on that planetoid with him didn't you, Spock?"

"Yes, Captain, he is worthy of respect. He is only one Klingon, but who is to say that there are not many like him on his home worlds."

"Indeed - and let's hope we meet some of them before too long."

